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ISSUE #156 JULY 2005

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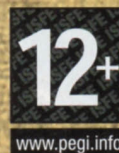


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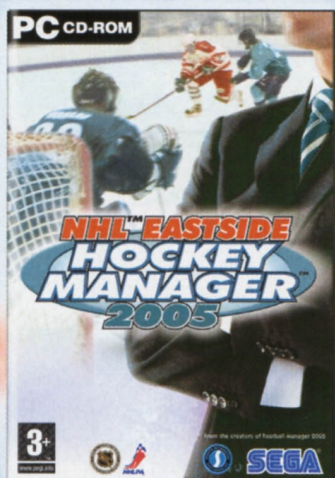


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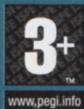
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THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

UT2007

The only mag to play Epic's revolutionary shooter!

P34



Show Business

Yes, it's E3 time again. All the world's videogame developers, publishers, PRs, journalists, blaggers, hardware manufacturers,

marketing scum and booth babes descend on Los Angeles for a chaotic, three-day expo. It's in a hot, sweaty downtown convention centre with more than half-a-million square feet of floor space, where billions of dollars are won and lost on the strength of a presentation, and where thousands of amazing new games are played, deals are struck, drinks are drunk, parties are crashed, expenses are hammered and Playboy Mansion lawns are urinated on (if you're *PC ZONE*).

However, you won't even have to have a whiff of a giant American online games journalist's armpit, as we do all the hard work and present over this issue and next, the definitive guide to the games that you'll be playing this year and beyond. In fact, we actually had the biggest scoop of E3 2005 a month before the show – *Unreal Tournament 2007*.

Developer Epic allowed us unprecedented exclusive access of the truly next-generation Unreal Engine 3-powered shooter, which looks set to redefine what can be accomplished with PC games (page 34). A big shout goes out to vice-president Mark Rein and the team, who worked round-the-clock to provide new screenshots that feature an incredible 'city' level never seen before anywhere else on the planet.

We've also got an exclusive hands-on of *Age Of Empires III* (p48), a first look of 3D Realms' long-lost FPS *Prey* (page 10), new *Quake IV* screens (p58), the first shots and details on *World Of Warcraft: Battlegrounds* (p102) and we break the story of id's secret new game *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* (p13).

I'm jetlagged, my head is pounding and I look and smell like Dave Woods after a typical night out – but by god, it's been fun. Erm... Can I book my flight for E3 2006 now please?

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton
Acting Editor



COVER DISCS P136 →

■ DEMOS AND MOVIES!

Take charge in Gearbox's tactical WWII shooter *Brothers In Arms*, think outside the box with the excellent *Psychonauts*, see if *Champ Man 5* lives up to its former reputation and take *Deus Ex's* cousin *Project: Snowblind* out for a spin.

■ DVD EXCLUSIVES

Command massive armies of men in *Cossacks II* and try out the multiplayer modes of *Pariah* and *Act Of War*. Plus movies of *Call Of Cthulhu*, *Half-Life 2*-based comics and much more!

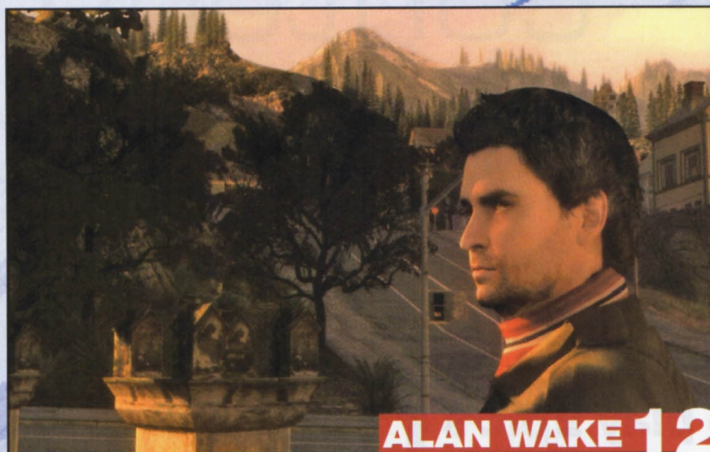


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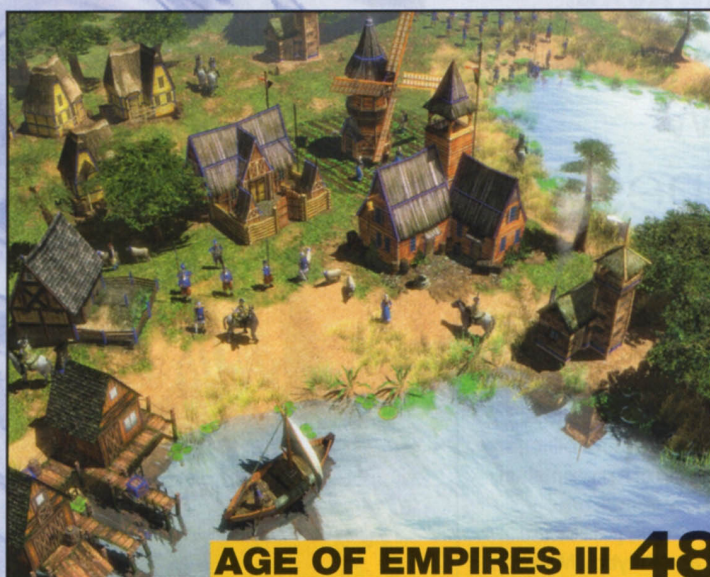
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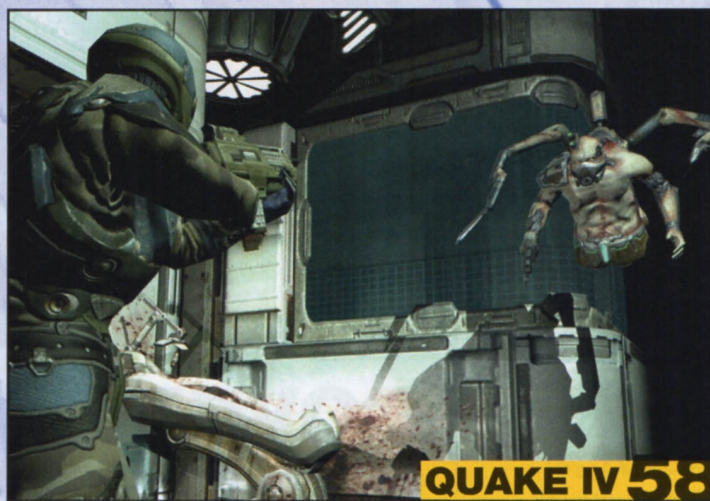
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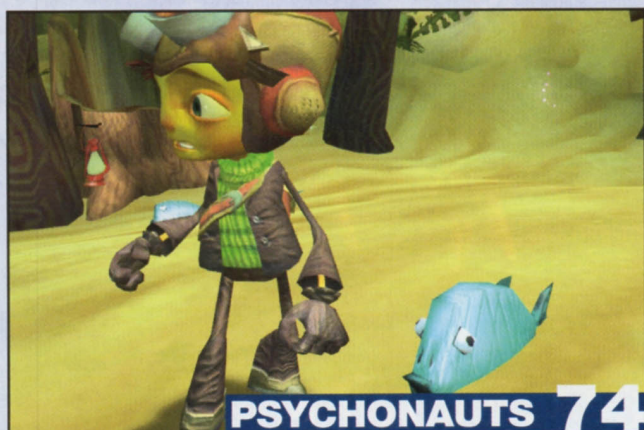
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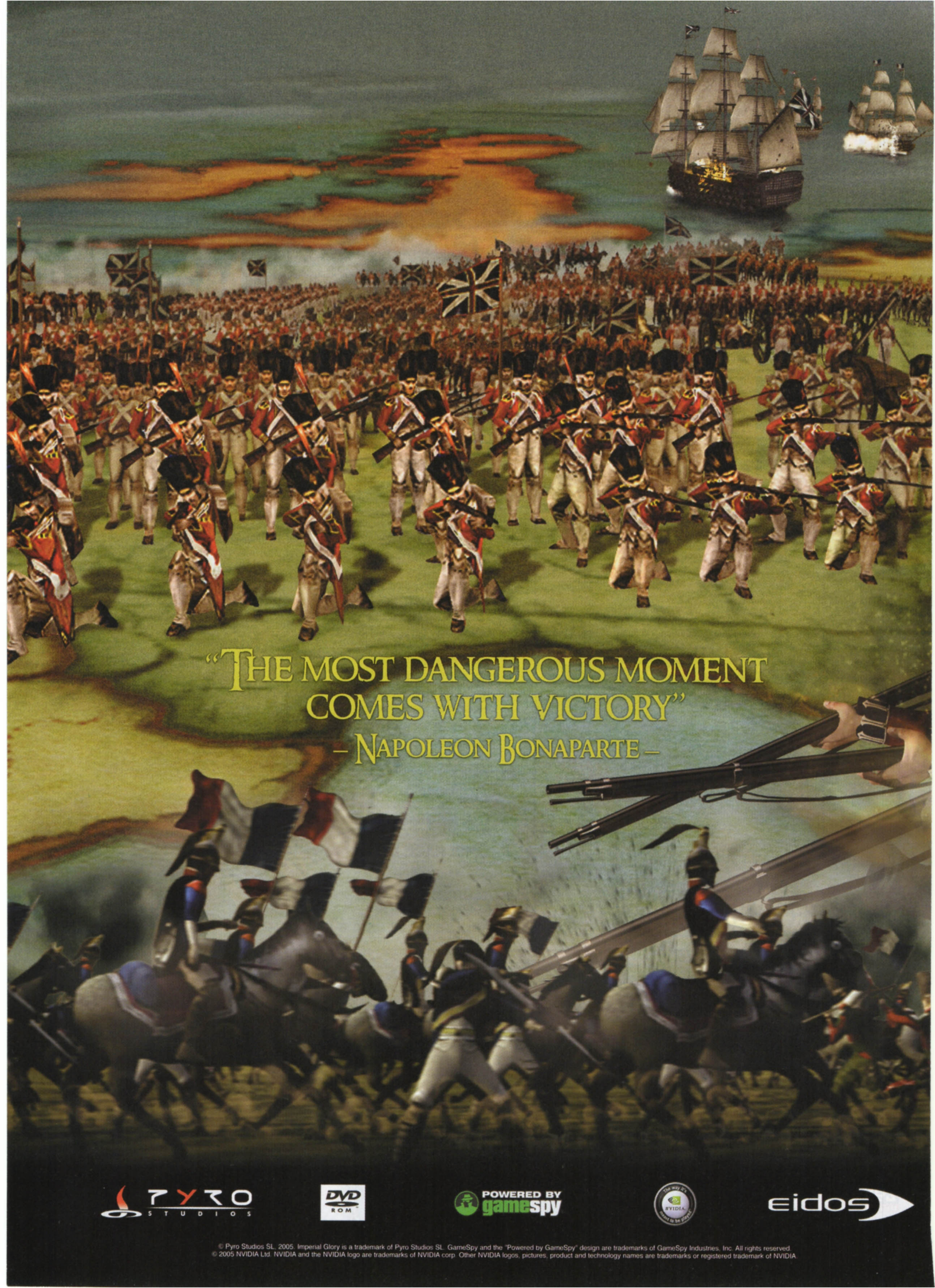
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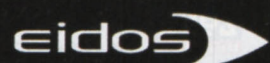
WIN! **TINY COMPO:** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (156), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: June 22 2005. The winner of our April Tiny Compo (154) was John Austin from Reigate who sent in a lovely postcard from Lulworth Cove where they have an excellent smuggling museum. All Saints was the answer.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!



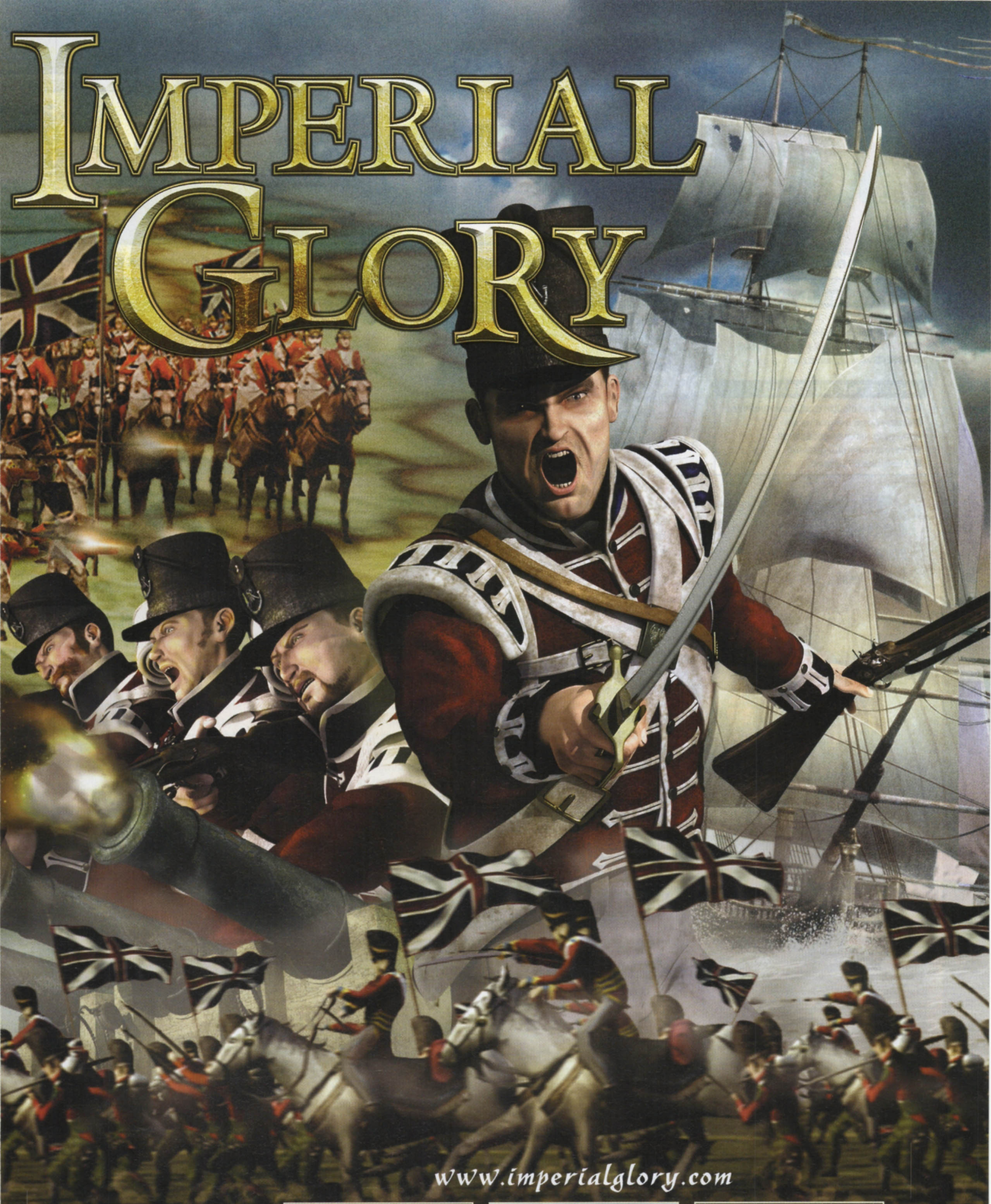


“THE MOST DANGEROUS MOMENT
COMES WITH VICTORY”
— NAPOLEON BONAPARTE —



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Get on your knees...

FIRST
Look!

PREY

2005
3
PART ONE

Just when he thought he was out, they pull him back in...

COMEBACK KID Will Porter

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

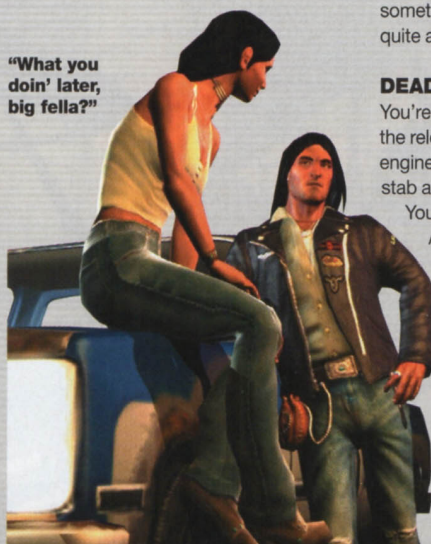
PUBLISHER Take 2
DEVELOPER Human Head Studios
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Late 2005
WEBSITE www.3drealms.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A game long thought dead, now rejuvenated
- Snazzy Doom 3 engine visuals
- Intriguing Native American angle
- Promised emotional gameplay
- A really nice E3 surprise

"There are even some possessed six-year-old girls for you to shoot"

"What you doin' later, big fella?"



A CHALLENGE: name a game connected with 3D Realms that hasn't been bathed in brilliance by gaming angels. "Extreme PaintBrawl?" Erm, OK. "William Shatner's TekWar?" OK, OK, yes you've proved your point. "Plus Duke Nukem Forever is an aeon overdue, and that Prey game that was announced back in 1996 never saw the light of day due to engine problems and development snarl-ups." Ahah! Well that's where you're wrong! Look up at the top of this page! "Cripes. You got my number."

The greatest comeback since Lazarus? Well, we won't get out the hallelujahs until we've had a fiddle with the code, but the guys at Human Head (previously engaged with Rune) have taken the once-canned progeny of 3D Realms, mixed in a dollop of the Doom 3 engine and created something rather enticing. And looking quite a lot like Doom 3.

DEAD INDIAN

You're promised something other than the relentless march of badness of its engine-mate though, primarily a decent stab at emotionally involving the gamer.

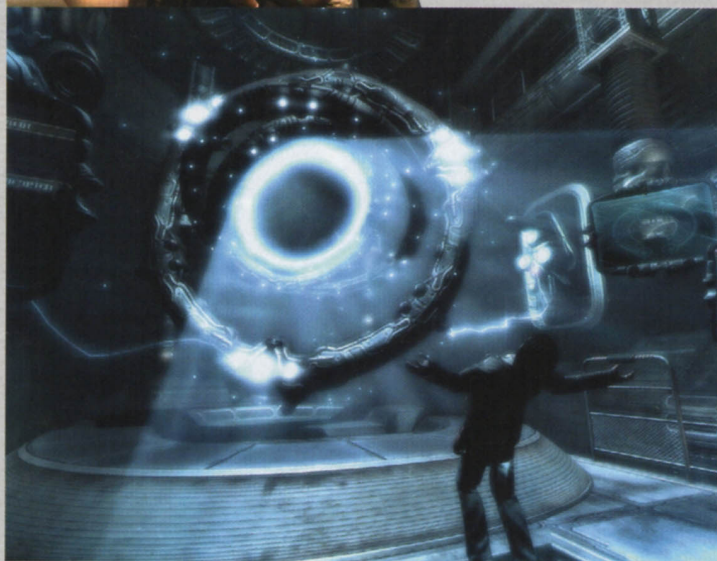
You play as Tommy, a man of Native American descent who's grown disillusioned with his roots and the reservation he lives on. This maudlin introspection is soon curtailed, however, when aliens turn up, wreck his grandad's bar, abduct his girlfriend Jenny and leave him stranded in the bowels of an invading flotilla of extra-terrestrial spacecraft. Just another day in videogame land then, folks!



The aliens of Prey: scarier than ALF.

Tommy comes packaged with some ancient Cherokee mythology and superpowers, and god knows why he wants to give it all up. If you had a spectral hawk called Talon who could read alien languages, would you pack him off in exchange for a career in accountancy? He can also spirit-walk, death-walk and moon-walk. The first has you scouting out territory through a hazy mist à la Psi Ops, the second means you get to hunt spectral animals after your demise to build up enough life force to reanimate yourself, and the third doesn't really happen at all – I just thought it sounded funny.

So then, it's 15-20 hours of emotional shooting in space with some really neat touches. On your quest to recover your alien-napped girlfriend you come across many other abductees, not all of them friendly. There are even some possessed six-years-old girls for you to shoot – blonde, tiny and pretty much homicidal. Add in a ton of spectacle to wrap your eyes around as well as these flying pigtail ragdolls, notably a flaming jumbo jet snatched from the sky and placed in suspended animation by the invading forces, and it's a recipe hard to dislike. Prey is back, and in fine fettle. All we need now is Nukem for the complete set. [A]



Spirit-walking can result in blurred vision.



Tommy's grandfather provides spiritual advice.



"Must... Have... Sunny Delight..."

BAD ALIEN, BIG TEETH

It may be built on *Doom 3* tech, but Human Head claims there'll be more to AI than the spawn-and-charge mentality of id's beast catalogue. These meanies are known as hunters, and they'll know how to duck, cover and – well – hunt, basically...

PORTAL IN A STORM

These here portals will be peppered throughout the game, enabling you and your enemies to jump through with wild abandon. There's no load time as you look or leap through, and while one exit portal could be upright, another could have you falling from a ceiling.

PURRING ENGINE

Prey uses a heavily-modified *Doom 3* engine, and even though it'll have the same grimy passages, Human Head is promising massive caverns and hangars too.

KEMOSABE'S CANNONS

Gun info is sparse at the moment, although you'll definitely be armed with something known as a Spirit Bow. You'll also get to pilot a gun-toting 2001: *A Space Odyssey*-style pod out in the inky blackness of space.

THEY'RE ON THE WALLS

Due to somewhat erratic gravity, both hunters and hunted will be able to walk up and across certain walls and ceilings – forcing you into full appreciation of all three dimensions.

SUMMON SPIELBERG

UFO folklore, Area 51 conspiracies and all manner of *War Of The Worlds* tales have been researched to give a real feeling of imminent invasion by these Giger-esque monsters.



ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

NUMBER ONE FAN



■ NEWS EDITOR Will Porter

▲ There are many things that make me feel warm inside. Hearing news of the hatching and matching of my friends is one, finding a copy of *The Sun* lying on the cubicle floor in the office toilets is another. Eating bacon or wine gums has much the same effect. However, there is no feeling – no feeling whatsoever – like getting in touch with your favourite developers and organising coverage of their new games.

It happened this month with Remedy, the plucky Scandinavians who created *Max Payne 2* – a game to which I recently dedicated a small woodland shrine, with incense, candles and everything. Even when emailing them about their new franchise, I couldn't help but jam in incessantly nerdy references about me being "the greatest of all your journalistic friends," and other such *Payne*-inspired nonsense. They seemed a little concerned that I had completed their last oeuvre at least nine times, but then again, most people usually are.

Never mind though, they weren't scared off and as such, at the time of writing, we're some of the first people privileged enough to get the scoop on Remedy's first post-*Max* offering – *Alan Wake*. We're probably some of the first people to think that the name's a little bit silly as well, but we'll gloss over that for now. The game is looking stunning – like *Silent Hill* meets David Lynch meets *Payne*'s trademark stubble – and I swear he looks just a little bit like a weather-beaten version of our own Wandy to boot. Or maybe that's just me.

I've had to stay in the office (once again) for this year's E3, so I haven't actually been able to physically jump in Remedy's lap, cavort with them and tell them that I love them – but in the long run this is probably a good thing. Over the past year, I've learnt the hard way that games developers don't respond well to this. Ron 'Monkey Island' Gilbert is still recovering.

AFTER THE PAYNE HAS GONE...

REMEDY PRESENTS ITS NEW OPUS TO US AND THE WORLD. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MEET ALAN WAKE

THE MEN WHO perfected bullet-time and both style and substance in the *Max Payne* games are back. Back with a game guaranteed to impress, and guaranteed to shit you up good. The third-person perspective remains, as does the stubble, but the unnerving, deeply psychological world of *Alan Wake* is very different from the explosive noir of *Payne*.

Wake is a best-selling horror writer of the Stephen King mould – one who has suffered terrible nightmares ever since the unexplained disappearance of his fiancée. Now holed up in a sleep clinic on a mountainside near the secluded all-American town of Bright Falls, Washington, things are about to go even more wrong. Far, far more wrong.

"Receiving treatment at the clinic, Wake begins to write a novel about his nightmares," explains Petri Jarvilehto, lead game designer at Remedy. "But somehow, impossibly, it seems that the town of Bright Falls starts to change and slide towards something awful that bears a close resemblance to his book and his nightmares. Wake ends up fighting for his life with a torch and a gun in his hands, trying to understand

what is happening, what's true and what's imagined."

We're in *Silent Hill* territory then, in terms of story at least – perhaps no bad thing since Konami has been pissing against a wall recently in its search for the essence of what made its earlier works so great. *Alan Wake* is being touted as an action thriller though, designed as a mission-orientated game which leans heavily on a cinematic edge.

Petri goes on: "In the *Max Payne* games we used movies as our inspirational starting point – John Woo and Hong Kong action movies for the gameplay, film noir detective stories for the game's story. We see this as our way of doing things. We take those classic elements everyone is familiar with and create something new out of them. *Alan Wake* is a psychological action thriller. We use dreams and nightmares, and the blurring



Sunday morning in our quiet little redneck mountain town...





SPECIAL REPORT
Eastern pleasures



BONE
Beyond Freelance Police



GHOST RECON 3
Best Clancy yet?



HOT SHOTS
Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War



Payne has left the building, but the stubble remains.



There's a stranger in town... and mischief afoot.



Wake: thoughtful.



The play area seems a lot like *Stalker*.

line between them and the reality, as a theme. The familiar setting is the idyllic American small town with something threatening waiting under the surface.

There's a huge amount of different movies and TV series, from David Lynch and *Twin Peaks* to M Night Shyamalan, that contain similar ideas."

BRAVE ALAN

Bright Falls itself is pure, undiluted Americana; a charming, secluded example of the American Dream – complete with diner, sheriff's station, gas pump and town hall. As with everything from *Desperate Housewives* to *Gremlins* however, there's something more than sinister lurking below

the surface. We still don't know exactly what, though – Remedy is keeping resolutely schtum on who or what you'll be using that rather frail-looking torch-pistol combo on. Suffice to say, it won't be pretty.

Petri is especially keen for us to appreciate the balance between dark and light in his game – pointing out the difference in tone and atmosphere that can be taken from the same scenes at different times of the day. He promises a truly living, breathing world to explore: "Pretty much everything in the game is completely dynamic. The sun, shadows, light, wind, trees, foliage, water – none of these are static elements anymore," he says. There'll be no irritating load-times either; everything will be streamed, and drivable vehicles are seen as integral to Alan's pursuit of scary things in such a large play area. After the unapologetically linear *Payne* games it seems that Remedy is promising a far freer and interactive experience with Mr Wake – although Petri advises that we should still expect more than a couple of the physical flourishes that made *The Fall Of Max Payne* such an immaculate experience.

So it's the next great hope for horror, action and the pursuit of unconfined terror? That's what Remedy is hoping. It's what we're thinking too...

■ **Publisher:** TBA
■ **Developer:** Remedy
■ **ETA:** TBA
■ **Website:** www.alanwake.com

REVENGE OF THE STROGG

MASSIVE SCOOP!

ID ANNOUNCES *ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS*

As game announcements go, this one was somewhat unorthodox. Activision's Pre-E3 Editors' Day in LA had begun without incident, consisting of a series of presentations in which dead-eyed Americans explained how they were "really excited about this product." Lunch duly followed, which for your PC ZONE correspondent consisted of wolfing down a variety of meat products before retiring to a darkened room for an hour to prepare for the afternoon's round-table sessions. Following some in-depth discussion on the likes of *Shrek SuperSlam*, the time came for the *Quake IV* chat, whereby our – literally – round table was joined by id lead designer Tim Willits. He immediately announced that in 15 minutes' time, someone had to remind him to make a special announcement that had nothing to do with *Quake IV*. Twelve minutes later, prompted by an Australian journalist who went off early, Willits proclaimed to a breathless audience, "id Software is announcing a new *Enemy Territory* game."

The original World War II-based *Enemy Territory* was given away free, and currently ranks behind *Counter-Strike* as the second most popular online multiplayer shooter. As for the new one, it's being developed by id and Splash Damage (who did the

original) and is set in the Earth versus Strogg universe. Crucially, as Willits confirmed, "*Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* will be a complete stand-alone title that will not be free. It is not the mission pack for *Quake IV*, it is not the multiplayer component for *Quake IV*. It is a completely separate title."

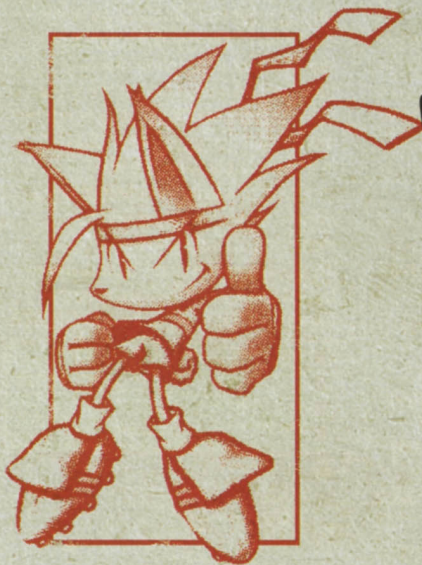
Using a heavily modified *Doom 3* engine, expect vehicles and flying machines operating in huge, open areas to deliver a team-based, class-based *Enemy Territory* experience. Expect it to be really quite good as well.

■ **Publisher:** Activision
■ **Developer:** id Software/Splash Damage
■ **ETA:** TBA
■ **Website:** www.idsoftware.com



SPECIAL REPORT

THE KOREAN GAMING ADDICTION



Think the West holds all the aces when it comes to PC gaming? Pavel Barter meets up with the acolytes of the Korean gaming industry and finds a rather different story



Lineage is as hard to decipher as a Magic Eye picture.

NOVEMBER 29, 2003. A rabid MMOG fan, known simply as Mr Jin, walks into a 24-hour Internet café in Seoul, South Korea, and starts playing *Lineage II*, sequel to the biggest multiplayer online game in history. December 17, 2003: 438 hours and 38 minutes later, Mr Jin is thrown out because he couldn't pay the bill. According to reports in Korean newspaper *JoonAng Daily*, he hadn't washed during his entire stay.

As disgusting as this may sound, dirt is better than dead. A year previously, Kim Kyung-jae (24) breathed his last after an 86-hour *Lineage* frenzy. "The only breaks he had were when he briefly stopped to buy cigarettes and use the toilet," investigating officer detective Hong Gun-hee told the BBC. Cause of death: deep vein thrombosis. And you thought you were pushing the boat out staying up until dawn playing *World of Warcraft*?

YOU ARE AN OBSESSION

Although most Koreans know when to call it quits, many take their gaming deathly seriously. This is a nation where the most popular career choice for high-school boys is professional gaming, where the government has established a Centre for Internet Addiction Prevention and Counselling, and where three cable TV channels are dedicated exclusively to PC game tournaments and real-time walkthroughs.

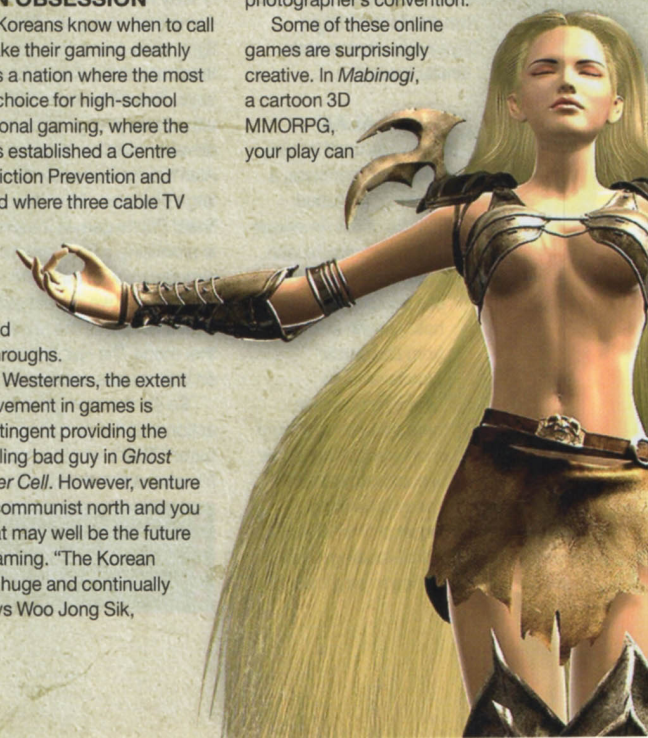
For us pasty Westerners, the extent of Korea's involvement in games is its northern contingent providing the occasional snarling bad guy in *Ghost Recon* or *Splinter Cell*. However, venture away from the communist north and you find a nation that may well be the future of networked gaming. "The Korean game market is huge and continually expanding," says Woo Jong Sik,

president of the Korea Game and Promotion Institute (KGPI). "The most popular platform is PC – sword-fighting, RPGs – and the ages range from 15 to early 30s."

Park Won Byum, CEO of GNI Soft, creator of networked game *Carpe Diem* continues: "Korea has the best infrastructure and human resources in the game development field and the hottest game market in the world. A few months after its release, *Carpe Diem* secured over 10,000 subscribers. Four separate servers are now being operated for the game."

In 2004, Korea's game market was worth over \$4 billion. Part of this was bankrolled from 2D puzzle games (*Super Tactics*), racing games (*Team RevoluXion*), and sports titles (*ZeroCup*) – but nothing compares to the ferocious popularity of the MMOG, which leaves Korean first-person shooters like *Karma Online* (a WWII meets *Starship Troopers* shoot 'em up) as rare as Bigfoot at a photographer's convention.

Some of these online games are surprisingly creative. In *Mabinogi*, a cartoon 3D MMORPG, your play can





X Tango: Strictly Come Dancing without Bruce.



Make sweet music with Mabinogi and its cartoon crew.



StarCraft: inordinately popular in Korea.



Who's driving? Bear is driving! How can this be? In Lineage II.

be accompanied by self-composed tunes via a rudimentary music-making system. *Khan*, another online RPG which charts the history of 13th century marauder Genghis Khan, uses Voice User Interface technology to translate text to speech. *Destiny Online*, meanwhile, was one of the first massively multiplayer online RTS titles in the world.

Visually, a snake with a festering arse is a more attractive proposition than some Korean titles – their graphical mediocrity would frighten a medieval peasant. *Kingdom Of The World* for example, based on a best-selling Korean comic-book, harks back to the graphically early days of *Zelda*. *Lineage* meanwhile, the world's most popular online RPG with over four million subscribers, appears to have been crafted by butcher's knives; it was a happy day when the developers removed their white aprons for *Lineage II* – a far prettier prospect.

BANG BANG

The popularity of MMOGs can be attributed to the 21,000 PC arcades scattered across the country – or 'Bangs' as they're known. Regularly visited by teenage couples for hot multiplayer dates,

these game parlours are the backbone of the Korean game industry, although some, especially in downtown Seoul, have acquired a dangerous rep. With the popularity of *Lineage* and its online teams of sword-swinging crusaders came real-world gangs and real-world violence. In 2003, a group of thugs burst into a Seoul Bang and proceeded to kick seven shades out of a man who'd killed one of their characters in the game. Recently, a *Legends Of Mir 3* player stabbed to death another for robbing his 'Dragon Sabre' and selling it online. In short, the *Daily Mail* would not be short of headline material...

Western publishers have tried to get a foothold here through various localisation

tweaks – creating Korean-named characters, place names and the like. Most efforts, however, have flopped because of chalk and cheese cultural differences. Korean gamers don't much care for FPS genres or even graphical realism. US and European titles that do break big capture a crucial gameplay ingredient: persistence. Korean gamers want to be rewarded for long-term play with characters, attributes and weaponry they can be proud of.

LOST IN A BLIZZARD

Amazingly, one of the few franchises to breach the divide is *StarCraft*. Indeed, the game has become an institution in Korea, many of its fans considering themselves 'StarCraft players' rather than PC gamers. Developer Blizzard has been successful across the board, with *Warcraft III*, *Diablo 2: Lord Of Destruction*, and 2005's *World Of Warcraft* hitting the number one sales spot for months on end. In January, Blizzard opened an office in Seoul to manage local support for *WOW* – another huge breakthrough for a company who suddenly found itself the international king of the MMOG.

Perhaps Korea has more to offer us than we have to give them. Certainly, their developers know the MMOG like the back of their hands, which gives them an unrivalled competitive edge in gaming's global sandpit. For all their pseudo sword-and-sorcery RPG mumbo jumbo, they're also perfectly capable of creating

ASYLUM SEEKERS

GOGOSI

One of the first online costume play games that lets you dress up like a girl and meet online with other like-minded transvestites.



KOKOLOOK

A fashion shop management simulation. "The baseline story is Princess NaNa, the heroine, accidentally uses up Cream Vill's reconstruction budget and must reconstruct Cream Vill by transforming it into a sightseeing city," says its developer. Novel, at any rate.



PRIEST

Korea's take on the Wicky Wicky Wild West: a horror RPG, and a welcomed break from the usual medieval fantasy codswallop.



DOG FIGHT WORLD CUP

Hold the phone calls to the RSPCA: this isn't pooch-on-pooch violence but a football game with dogs replacing human players.



innovative 'you what?' titles. *X Tango* is a co-operative ballroom dancing sim where you choreograph your own routines; *O2 Jam* is an MMOMPG (Massively Multi Online Music Play Game), enabling you to set up virtual Gorillaz-type online bands. Games in Korea don't just need a gruff man holding a gun on the box to sell.

Tactical Commanders, the first MMOG to be co-developed by Korean and North American teams appeared a few years ago, and with Korean developers now making a bigger appearance at industry events like E3, East will be increasingly meeting West on your desktop. "Korean games have a strength over European and American markets. In the future, we'll see many, many more online Korean game companies appearing," contends Woo Jong Sik. What with a Korean company like NCsoft preparing to roll out West-centric MMOGs like *City Of Villains*, *Auto Assault* and *Tabula Rasa* – while still prepping the dual East-West release of the hugely impressive *Guild Wars* – it's hard to disagree.

Aside from causing its gamers to stink, drop dead, kill and beat each other up, harmless MMOG obsession is likely to continue unabated in the land of Eastern promise. Yoon Dae Won (24), an MMOG-obsessed South Korean man, recently told the *International Herald Tribune*: "I'm an elf. I kill monsters. And when I can't, I dream about it." [P2]

"The only breaks he had were when he briefly stopped to buy cigarettes and use the toilet"



The Team RevoluXion line up here.



An RYL Online characters meet and greet.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

A VICIOUS race war has broken out via the unlikely medium of the *Final Fantasy XI* online role-playing game, which has been the victim of **targeted attacks**, resulting in service problems for hundreds of thousands of users. One theory as to the source of the attacks is that **hackers** in China have launched them as part of a **political protest** aimed at **Japan**, whose **government** recently approved **school textbooks** that Chinese activists claim to gloss over **wartime atrocities**. One offending item is the **Nanjing Massacre**, in which between 50,000 and 300,000 Chinese civilians were killed, but is dismissed in the literature as "an incident." **Square-Enix** did not comment on the theory that the textbook row is linked to the attacks, but a spokesman spat: "We have determined that this activity was undertaken with malicious intent. Our technicians are taking every measure possible to prevent further attacks."

US publisher **Ideas From the Deep** has contacted the **FBI** with allegations that **Take 2 Interactive** is selling **illegal** copies of its game, **Bugdom**. IFD co-founder **Lane Roathe** wept: "I called the FBI basically because I don't have the financial resources to go after Take 2 with a civil lawsuit, and it occurred to me that what they're doing should not actually be legal."

A **sick new game** is set to prey on America's so-called **fear culture**. **American McGee's** forthcoming **Bad Day LA** will exploit the all-pervading **paranoia** that keeps the populace in a state of **gun-wielding terror** and ensures that they vote for a **barely-literate redneck**. The action-adventure title sees you explore the **smog-filled** streets of **Los Angeles**, while avoiding such tangible threats as **terrorists**, **earthquakes** and **zombies**. Inspired to make the game during a drive through the city, McGee drawled: "There, hanging above the glitz and glamour of Sunset Strip, was a PC billboard that inquired, 'Bioterror attack. Are you prepared?'" And I thought to myself, 'Uh, no.' At that moment I decided to create a game about the current American fear culture." **Contradicting** everything he'd just said, McGee sneered: "The game has a lot of political message to it, but unless you look hard, you won't really find it."

"Bad Day LA will exploit the all-pervading paranoia that keeps the American populace in a state of gun-wielding terror"

GAME OVER

SEARCH FOR A GAME RESULTS ARE IN!
WINNER ANNOUNCED!

Search For
a Game



AND NOW OUR final vote from Norway!

Et maintenant notre vote final de Norvege!

Hello Norway! "Good Evening Prezzer, and how are

you today?" I'm fine! Can we have your votes

please? "Yes, the weather here is very nice and may I say

you are looking very good." Thank you! And how have you been voting? "We have a

saying here in my country that reindeer often look cold in the snow!" Haha! And

your vote? "Yes indeed. *Lord Of The Rings Real-time Agricultural Simulator* - zero

points." *Lord Of The Rings Real-time Agricultural Simulator*, nil points...

That's right it's finally over. A year of dressing up Will like a girl has just flown

by - even a beauty such as his has to fade. We all thought the one with the

zombies or the *Morrowind*-with-cowboys would walk it - but it turned out quite

different. And so, ladies and gentlemen, here are the final results!

5	CHAIN OF COMMAND (MULTIPLAYER RTS)	1%
4	ROCKETMAN CHRONICLES (MAFIA WITH ROBOTS)	5%
3	ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE (GTA ZOMBIE)	16%
2	FRONTIER (COWBOY MORROWIND)	38%

LEAVING ONE WINNER, AND ONE WINNER ALONE!

1 JERSEY UNDER SIEGE!



With a massive 40 per cent of the public's backing, this *Far Cry* meets *Midwinter* on the Nazi-occupied isle of Jersey came from nowhere to win the hearts and minds of the British gaming populace.

The game's inordinately grateful creator is one Stuart Prosser from Bath who receives a spangly graphics card for his efforts. Hooray and hoorah! Congratulations to one and all...



ROUND-UP

HERDING CURIOUS NUGGETS OF GAMING INFO INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN



AND THE WINNER IS...

Valve Software, which has won its legal battle against publisher VU games over the online distribution rights of its wares. The settlement means that VU will no longer sell retail copies of Valve games beyond August 31, essentially meaning that *Half-Life 2* and *HL2: Aftermath* sales are going to be restricted to Steam. Non-broadband connected readers can scream... now. We'll dig deep for details next issue.



WAITING FOR MONTANA

Al Pacino's likeness is in place, but the game (which was looking a bit dated to be honest) has been shifted over to next-gen machines. This can only be good news for the PC release, and hopefully the (clearly *Vice City* inspired) criminal shenanigans will hold a coke-coloured candle to De Palma's cinematic masterpiece. And hopefully the chainsaw/shower bit will be in it too.



I hate that duck



ELIXIR OF SORROW

We're extremely saddened to report the closure of Elixir, the team responsible for *Republic: The Revolution* and *Evil Genius*. Pretty much abandoned since its new game was considered too



'high risk' by a leading US Publisher, a small company like Elixir producing innovative titles simply couldn't survive in a business driven by franchise, profit and the forces of evil. Boo.



IF I HAD SOME HAMMERS

Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers. What a weird, weird name. It's a FSW sequel, but the marines seem to have found their way from Turkmenistan into their local branch of B&Q. Nevertheless, drivable vehicles, building interiors, snipers and heightened multiplayer tomfoolery are all promised.



GOOD CHOP BAD CHOP

GOOD CHOP

The birth of Yuna Jane Presley. Yes, she's really sweet. Yes, her daddy is overwhelmingly proud. No, she's not a ginger.



Sefton, Hill and Holden jetting off to LA for E3, leaving jealousy and resentment in their wake.

Drinking grog with our hero Ron 'Monkey Island' Gilbert. Easily a candidate for nicest man on earth.

BAD CHOP

Sam Kielsen hearing the fart of one of the world's leading game designers while in an adjacent San Franciscan toilet cubicle.

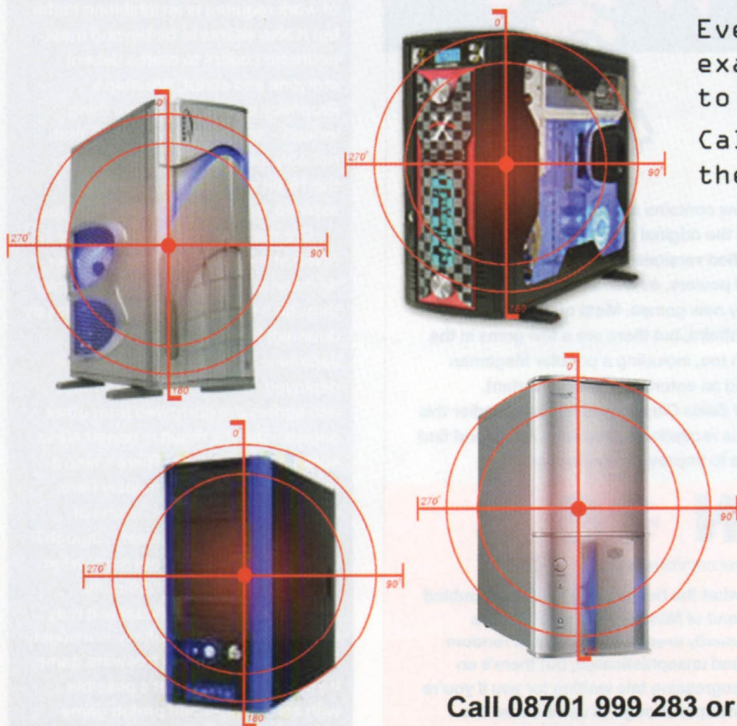
Growing World Of Warcraft addiction. Entire pub conversations on leatherwork. God help us.

Getting dangerously close to running out of words that rhyme with cop for this bit of the mag.

Good Chop: Lamb. Bad Chop: Pork. Because when asked "Will you the pork, or will you the lamb?" we'd normally go for the lamb.

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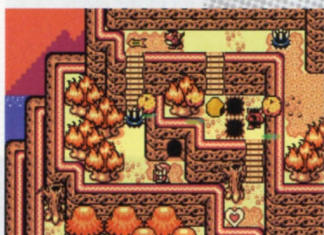
FREWARE | HOME-BREWS | WEBGAMES | ABANDONWARE | EMULATION

FREEPLAY

Some of the best things in life are free! **Anthony Holden's** got the proof...

**LEVEL UP!
RPG SPECIAL**

IN THE FIRST of several planned themed editions of Freeplay, we're focusing our penniless gaze this month on the realm of free role-playing games. The Internet is positively infested with the things if you know where to look, but we've whittled them down to a few goblin-battering favourites, drawing from the homebrew scene, fan remakes, abandonware and emulation. Thy destiny awaits...



8-bit *Zelda* reinvented a hundred times over...

ZELDA CLASSIC

■ Developer: Armageddon Games ■ Website: www.zeldaclassic.com

To say *Zelda Classic* is a remake of Nintendo's original *Legend Of Zelda* would be to do it an injustice. At its inception it was just that – an attempt to precisely replicate the NES masterpiece for modern PC systems. But this objective (in itself no mean feat) was achieved some five years ago, and since then the game has developed into something far more interesting. Now, with its custom ZQuest editing tool, *ZC* acts more like an 8-bit RPG engine for a community of Nintendo enthusiasts who've spent several years creating a mountain of new downloadable quests for the game.

The *ZC* database now contains nearly 200 quests, including faithful versions of the original game with updated graphics, modified versions with new enemies, weapons and powers, as well as dozens upon dozens of completely new games. Most of these are amateurish affairs, but there are a few gems in the undergrowth too, including a popular Megaman adventure and an entertaining pirate variant. Version 2.10 of *Zelda Classic* was released earlier this year to a rapturous reception – download it now and find out if it really is possible to improve on perfection.

**FREE
GAME OF
THE MONTH!**



You heard the man.

DIVER DOWN

■ Developer: Grenideer ■ Website: www.grenideer.com/diverdown

If traditional Japanese RPGs aren't your flavour, another indie RPG worth checking out is *Diver Down*. Most notable for its intricate and atypical storyline, *Diver Down* tells the tale of Drek, a shell-shocked knight struggling to regain his memory and work out

what the hell is going on in the troubled land of Minduul. The graphics are mostly dreadful, the combat random and unsophisticated, but there's an engrossing tale waiting for you if you're intrepid enough to delve below the surface. Go on, give it a go.



Hello yourself.

AHRIMAN'S PROPHECY

■ Developer: Amaranth Productions
■ Website: www.amaranthia.com

Good quality indie RPGs are few and far between. Clearly, the vast amount of work required is an inhibiting factor, but it also seems to be beyond most bedroom coders to craft a decent storyline and script. *Ahriman's Prophecy* is thus a very rare thing indeed – an epic freeware RPG that not only looks and sounds good (by the 16-bit standards to which it aspires), but reads and plays well too.

Created very much in the image of SNES standards like *Chrono Trigger*, *Ahriman's Prophecy* is a breezy romp through a typically cute (yet hopelessly doomed) fantasy world. Every Japanese RPG cliché in the book is deployed – and many of the sounds and sprites are borrowed from other games – but the result is nonetheless surprisingly playable. There's also a massive amount of gameplay here, with hundreds of NPCs, reams of dialogue and over 40 quests, though it does falsely pad itself out somewhat with an absurd level of difficulty.

Derivative and predictable it may be, but *Ahriman's Prophecy* is a hugely impressive effort for a freeware game. If you want to see what's possible with zero budget and prefab game elements, this is as good as it gets.

TOP 10... ESSENTIAL RPG EMUS

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI

Developer: Atlus Software Website: agtp.romhack.net

Emulation is all well and good for reliving the Japanese RPG back-catalogue, but many of the best examples from the 16-bit and 32-bit eras were simply never published in English. Perhaps the biggest omissions in this area are the missing entries in the astonishing, seminal *Shin Megami Tensei* series. Dubbed *Megaten* by the contraction-happy Japanese, the series is the third most popular in its home country, ranking only slightly below the mega-selling *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* franchises.

At their core, the older *Megaten* games are traditional, dungeon-based RPGs. However, they also introduced a host of brilliant innovations to the form, offering a powerful light/dark allegiance system that makes *Knights Of The Old Republic* look like *Golden Axe*.

Best of all, you can now play both *Shin Megami Tensei I* and *II* in perfect translation, thanks to the saint-like efforts of the Aeon Genesis Translation Project, a rom-hacking group whose contributions to free gaming are almost

without equal. In the last couple of years, AGTP has created English patches for both of the original games, meaning all you need to do is get yourself the latest version of Zsnes and a copy of the original game roms and you'll be in RPG nirvana.

Once you're done with these, there are some other great RPG treasures to check out in the AGTP vault, including *Chaos World*, *Cyber Knight* and the criminally-underrated *Sylvan Tale*. Time to get busy...



Greetings, I play games...



Geri Halliwell's looking a bit rough.



Those Japanese, eh?

WILD ABANDON



**GOLDEN OLDIE:
THE ELDER
SCROLLS: ARENA**

Download from: www.elderscrolls.com/downloads/downloads_games.htm

In the last few years, *The Elder Scrolls* has established itself as the most progressive, immersive and downright ambitious RPG series on the PC. The forthcoming *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is looking set to redefine the genre in stunning fashion, but in the meantime you can go back to where it all started with the first, epic entry in the franchise. It's free to download from the official site, and though you'll need an emulator such as DOSbox to run it, it's worth checking out just for the sheer size of the thing – one of the biggest RPG game-worlds ever created.



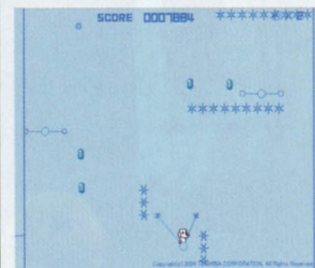
Sneakily does it.

If you don't mind hiding behind a slightly shaky ethical and legal defence, another excellent source of free RPGs is the realm of abandonware. For the uninitiated, abandonware is a term used to describe games that are no longer supported or sold by the company that owns them, a situation which is widely considered to be justification for distributing them freely on the Internet. Sometimes permission for non-profit distribution is granted by the licence-holder; in other cases, companies simply turn a blind eye.

We're going to take a more in-depth look at the legality and ethics of abandonware in a future issue, but in the meantime, if you believe in the concept, you can find a wealth of titles available for the cost of a mouse-click. One of the best and most respected abandonware sites is the Home Of The Underdogs (www.the-underdogs.org), where you can find full versions of many classic RPGs including *System Shock 2*, *Midwinter* and the overlooked historical epic *Darklands*.

Rescue these classics from oblivion now.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



TOBBY PACHI

Website: www.toshiba.co.jp/digital/game/tobby_pachi/play.html

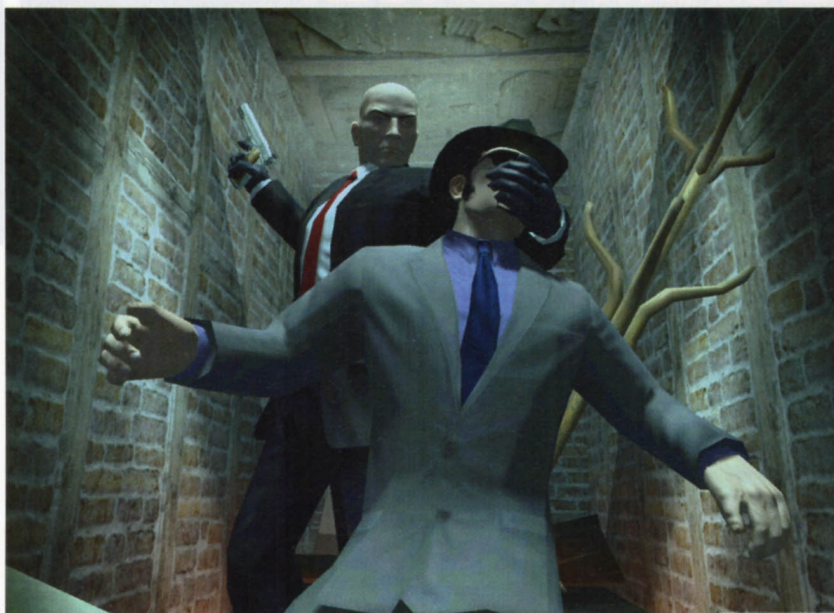
Not the most substantial webgame to be featured in these pages, but almost certainly the cutest, *Tobby Pachi* is a simplistic platform game built around dogs and elastic bands. The aim is get our hero Tobby to the top of a tall building, where his girlfriend Jelly Tobby is being held prisoner by the evil Bull Tobby – a sort of Doggy Kong if you will. To move Tobby up the levels, you have to slingshot him off the various elastic platforms dotted along the way, avoiding spikes and breaking through floors as you go.

It's about as simple as these things come, but also extremely charming (despite heavy corporate branding), and should provide a bit of respite from all this portentous self-fancying nonsense.

E3 BULLETIN SPECIAL!

IT'S THE MOST wonderful time of the year. Well, one of the most wonderful times of the year. Well, if you classify seven football pitches-worth of overweight people pretending not to gawp at scantily clad booth babes as wonderful, then yes – it is wonderful. It also helps if you like your games fresh, red raw and so bleeding-edge that it makes your brain hurt.

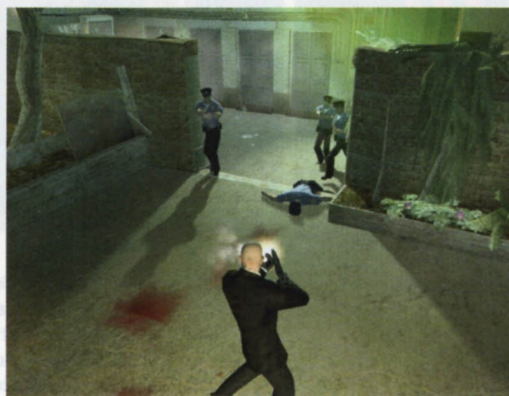
Some of the games on show were familiar friends to *ZONE*, like *F.E.A.R.* and *Call Of Duty 2*, while others like *Path Of Neo* were fresh burgeoning romances (we hope anyway) to take in, along with the smog-filtered night air of a Los Angeles hotel bar. This mag contains the first half of our E3 coverage, everything we could crowbar in before our deadline. To kick things off, here's a veritable smorgasbord of our most anticipated games. And no, we don't even know what a smorgasbord is. Only that it's Norwegian. And that A-Ha were too...



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

With his contract agency being wiped out one by one, Agent 47 is on the make in the US in a *Hitman* iteration that certainly looks the part – even if we've seen little to suggest that the things we've moaned about since the beginning of the franchise have been addressed.

Still, a stronger storyline, a more manoeuvrable murderer, customisable weapons and earned money to buy them with, more ingenious 'accidents' and (somehow) even more bondage gear shouldn't be sniffed at. Currently looking like the best of the bald-headed bunch.



THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

Let's be honest, another *Matrix* game after *Enter The Matrix* is a hard sell after a poor game and a franchise flushed down the cyber-toilet. Thing is though, that even if it's a widely held opinion, it's still a tad unfair. *Enter The Matrix* went through development hell, was dogged by money problems and staffing issues and was trapped in the collapse of Interplay before Shiny's shift to Atari. This time round, it's been given the time it needed – and it shows.

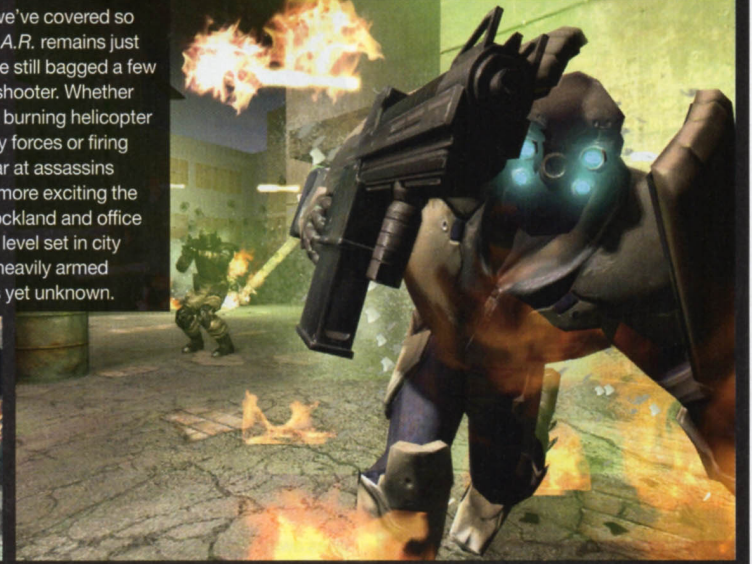
Concentrating predominantly on the understandably more popular original film helps, but Keanu's fighting and flying is really quite impressive, even if the console bias remains. Unsurprisingly, there's also a fair amount of bullet-time included.





F.E.A.R.

How can we know so little about a game we've covered so much? The cloak of mystery cast over *F.E.A.R.* remains just as enticing as it ever was this E3, but we've still bagged a few extra details on Monolith's thrilling horror-shooter. Whether falling out of the sky in-game, trapped in a burning helicopter and spraying bullets at encroaching enemy forces or firing out of the passenger side of a speeding car at assassins determined to kill you, the game just gets more exciting the closer it gets. We've seen levels in both dockland and office settings, while these new shots are from a level set in city slums – although exactly what a group of heavily armed militia and a scary girl are doing there is as yet unknown.



CALL OF DUTY 2

Can words express how excited we are about *COD2*? Well, yes they can – as it's the precise reason that god created words like 'very' or 'extremely'. It's always hard to see the essence of *Call Of Duty* in a screenshot – it's the bullets ripping through the air and the kinetic unpredictability that provide its magic. We've seen it in motion though, and sweet Jesus are you in for a treat. It's also looking like the improved battle chatter (in both English and German) is just one of many strings to an already prodigious bow. We'll reveal some more next issue.





Doug Binks
Head of studio at
Strangelite, the team behind
Starship Troopers

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Counter Strike: Source occupies any free lunch-times I get at work, and I'm still playing *Half-Life 2*. It's a game worth taking time over.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?

The first *Knights Of The Old Republic*, which was a great game but quite time-consuming. I like to finish games before I play new ones.

What is your favourite game of all time?

My favourite single-player game is *Half Life*. *Quake II* *Loki's Minions* CTF mod is my favourite multiplayer – although the *Battlefield* series almost knocks this off top spot.

What are you most proud of in your career?

Starship Troopers! We're not finished yet, but we're achieving amazing things given that we started the project with a small team and built everything from the ground up.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

The real driving force in PC gaming these days are strong teams like Bungie, id Software, Valve and Epic.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

Perhaps the longest-lasting legacy of PC gaming will be the community which has been built up around making maps, mods, and other user-provided content.

What is your company's philosophy?

As a development team we're here to produce commercially viable games which we enjoy playing and can take pride in creating.

What's the best thing about your job?

I get a fantastic buzz from seeing the team produce stunning work, knowing that I've done everything in my power to keep the production ball rolling without killing anyone in the process!

What's the worst thing about your job?

It can be hard to play a game without trying to analyse it. I'd like to just play games without my first thought on seeing a new adversary being, "How many polygons are in that?"

What are you working on at the moment?

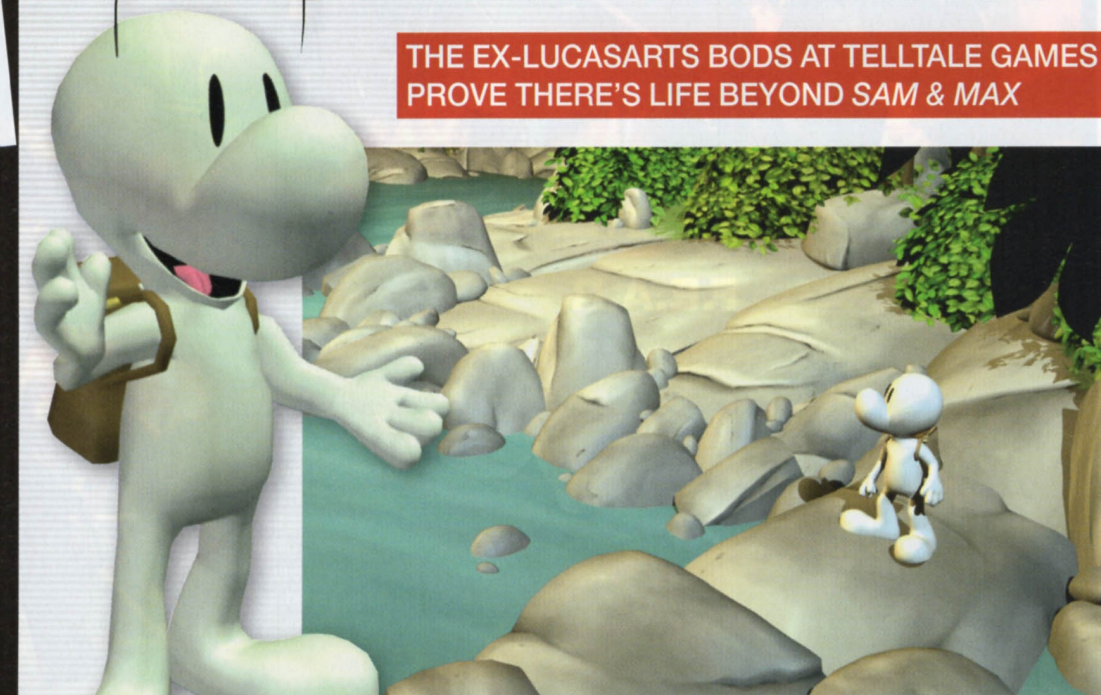
Starship Troopers, an FPS set in the universe of Sony Pictures' hit film. The sheer scale of the battles is stupefying as you'll have over 300 enemies attacking you at any one time – we're bringing the bug horde to the PC.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

Physics will be increasingly important. *Half-Life 2* is a good example of what can be achieved in this regard.

THROW ME A BONE HERE...

THE EX-LUCASARTS BODS AT TELLTALE GAMES PROVE THERE'S LIFE BEYOND SAM & MAX



Look at him and his cute little face. We like him lots.

NO MATTER how abused genres and licences may be, the talent behind them never goes away. Such, we hope, is the case with the *Freelance Police* developers now at TellTale games, and their newfound mascot Fone Bone – the famed (in certain circles) comic book creation of one Jeff Smith. Now we'd never heard of this little chap, so we gave Dan Connors (CEO of the TellTale enclave) a poke to find out more.

"It's the story of three cousins from a place called Boneville, who find themselves lost in a mysterious valley brimming with fantasy elements and humour," says Connors of his good-natured, mouse-driven adventure. "Fone Bone is the story's main protagonist. He has a good heart and a sense of responsibility to his friends



Magic Roundabout meets Blair Witch.



A debate with some rocks.

and family. Nonetheless, he comes into this new land, finds himself in over his head and has to figure out his place."

Seeing as it becomes apparent that Fone is initially armed with only a well-thumbed copy of *Moby Dick* for support, you can tell that the game is going to be a little eccentric. As you would expect of a tale about a skeletal moomin family, there's some fairly odd and subversive humour going on here – even if it will

never match the same brand of anarchy as *Sam & Max*. The plan is for Fone Bone's bizarre world to move beyond the strict confines of the point and clickers of old, while still having all the puzzles, dialogue and basic action elements that adventure fans know and love.

"Working on *Star Wars* throughout the years I learned to appreciate a deep licence, and I think *Bone* has some similar qualities," says Connors, elaborating on what makes *Bone* such ripe territory for a game. "But seeing as we're called TellTale, we are also very interested in the storytelling. Jeff Smith has managed to craft a story that has an ageless appeal to it, and stories like that are few and far between."

Due for independent digital distribution, the self-publishing of *Bone* could provide fresh legs for the ever-endangered (yet doggedly persistent) adventuring genre. We like it, and not just because of Bone's cute nubbins nose.

■ Publisher: N/A
■ Developer: TellTale Games
■ ETA: TBA
■ Website: www.telltalegames.com



Must be damaging to the tree, this.

But seriously, folks...

SERIOUS SAM SEQUEL PREPS ITSELF TO RECLAIM THE THRONE OF MINDLESS SHOOTAGE. MAYBE

IN THE WAKE of *Painkiller* (the game that brought physics, wooden stakes and zombies attached to walls by their teeth to the model forged by the Serious one), it's going to be a very different atmosphere on the shelves of your local games emporium for the CroTeam boys when their sequel gets an airing.

When the first *Serious Sam* came out, shooters were being crushed by po-faced affairs that were all about realism and headshots, so the stupid numbers of baddies, Duke

Nukem ethos and fun design of Sam really hit a chord with gamers. It was very much a Coco Pops to *Soldier Of Fortune's* Crunchy Nut Cornflakes; a packet of Jelly Tots to the Imperial Strong Mints bandwagon of Tom Clancy.

Now though, Sam's back for a second, second encounter – a proper one this time. Replete with physics, ultra-detailed environments that cover cities, swamps, volcanoes and tundra, 35 bizarre

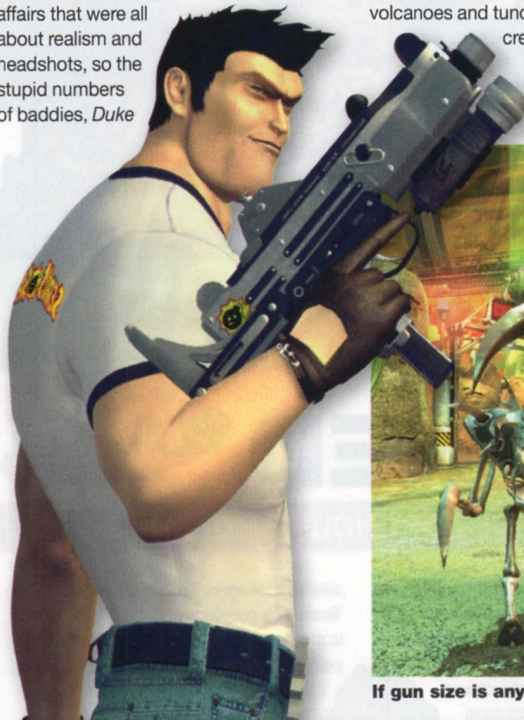
creatures to mutilate, vehicles to drive and animals to clamber atop and charge

around on. Can it make the same waves the last one did? Has *Painkiller* monopolised the market on shooting down witches on broomsticks? We've got our fingers crossed – CroTeam is a master of level design and innovation after all. We'll have a detailed look at Sam's new adventure in the coming months. Watch this space...

Publisher: Take 2
Developer: CroTeam
ETA: Autumn
Website: www.croteam.com



Witches: scary.



If gun size is anything to go by, Sam has a very small penis.



More on-screen enemies than ever!



"I knew nothing about it. They never asked me if I thought it was a good idea. They use the characters everyone knows... and then for the next hour they shoot and kill each other. I had absolutely nothing to do with the game and I disapprove."

Francis Ford Coppola is grumpy about EA's forthcoming game based on his epic Godfather series of movies.

"I knew about it from the beginning. They asked me if I thought it was a good idea. They use the characters everyone knows, and then within minutes they kill each other. I absolutely had something to do with the game, and I approve!"

The legendary Bruce Campbell isn't grumpy at all about the Evil Dead: Regeneration game. Groovy.

CHILDREN OF THE EVOLUTION

WILL WRIGHT'S MIND-MELTING SPORE PROJECT

THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE of Freeman bumped it out of last issue, but we can't go without mentioning Will Wright's quite remarkable plans for *Spore*. Unveiled at the GDC, it's a game that deals with the evolution of a single-celled organism all the way through to a full-on intergalactic civilisation. Continually evolving a creature through clever mating and genetic fiddling (raising it a few Darwinian notches above its peers through the giving of teeth, land-faring legs and the like), eventually you will have grown a race of sentient creatures – creatures that will perhaps be in competition with the creations of your mates, sent to you over the Net.

But wait, there's more. From here Wright's game, all chuntering away happily on a massive screen on its

unveiling, enters full-on *Civilization* mode. Competing against other real-time players' cities, you'll make friends or (should your army of razor-spiked reptiles put you in the mood for carnage) destroy all those in your path. From here there's making contact with Alien cultures and even more beyond...

The EA press robot's stance on the matter is that "*SPORE* is a top secret project at EA with no specific launch date, and the game is not included in EA's current financial forecast. Will Wright's GDC presentation focused on gameplay elements only." We're hooked on the concept, and are willing to take back (nearly) everything we've ever said about *The Sims* if Wright pulls it off.

BACK IN THE RECON-ING

GHOST RECON 3 BREAKS NEW BOUNDARIES. RESULTS CAUSE HYSTERIA AND MUCH JOY

THE THIRD *Ghost Recon* game (second for us, since the first sequel was recently nixed for PC) is going to be next-generation in more ways than one. First off, it's running on some amazingly advanced technology which, given Ubi's track record, is likely to be Unreal Engine 3. In the demo we saw, an explosion in the centre of Mexico City took out an office block. Debris was thrown everywhere, smoke billowed and ghost team-mates tumbled over vital fractions of a second later as the shockwaves hit them. It looked terrifyingly real, and without any of the flashes of orange flame that Hollywood has convinced us are the prerequisites of spectacular destruction.

It's next-gen too because of the technology at the disposal of you (Major Scott Mitchell) and your Ghost team. The weapons and equipment available are all real, and will be in common use by the year 2010, but are so technologically advanced that they border on science fiction. Some kit has been avoided altogether since the developer feared



That'll need re-plastering a bit on the quick side...

punters simply wouldn't believe it was real military hardware. Your helmet comes with a Cross-Corn monocle, for example, onto which maps, orders, viewpoints of your squad and even your own biorhythms are beamed. You can even call in hovering drones over enemy territories and get the information beamed straight into your helmet.

Set in Mexico City due to its proximity to the US and mix of environments (from slums and Mayan temples to rich corporate areas) *Ghost Recon 3* looks nothing short of stunning. Roll on the future.

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
ETA: Winter 2005
Website: www.ghostrecon.com

WORMS THAT TURNED

PLAYTEST!

WE BOOT UP A BUILD OF WORMS 4: MAYHEM AND REPORT ON OUR LOST HOUR OF CARNAGE



An Oscar-worthy death scene.



We're not convinced by that 'tache...

RIGHT THEN, first impressions. The *Worms* music is back! A bit slower, a bit more elevator music, but the old "We are worms, worms, worms" jingle hangs heavy in the air. Second up, the worms are beautifully animated – mugging to camera, perfectly lip-synched, waving their arms at you and mouthing "No, no, no!" if they're on the same side as you,

twirling their moustaches and the like.

A lot of ideas from *Forts* seem to have, ahem, wormed themselves into this incarnation as well – so the destruction of pre-built structures, defence of statues and lobbing of missiles over gigantic walls are all present and correct within the game modes available. It all



They've managed to accurately recreate Sefton's bemused, vacant expression.

seems a lot more slick and complete than Team 17's previous efforts as well, which is strange seeing as we're playing an 80 per cent complete build. Even navigating the jolly bouncing menu screens is a real pleasure.

Story mode has been given a kick up the clitellum* as well, with missions bookended by the meep-meep ramblings of a little fella called Professor Worminkle: the first mission he gave us being to enter a giant diner (with '60s jukebox music warbling in the background) to ignite some carelessly abandoned TNT and murder some hapless worm construction workers.

So, with holy hand grenades all present and correct, it's a positive first look at the return of the squirming ones. The weapon creator feature is quite intriguing and the various 'taches, hats and accoutrements of the worms themselves nothing short of charming. But is there still room in the gaming world for turn-based cutesy combat? We'll see come the PC ZONE review won't we?

Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Team 17
ETA: Summer
Website: www.codemasters.co.uk/worms

Back behind enemy lines

THE COMMANDOS RETURN FOR A FOURTH OUTING IN *COMMANDOS: STRIKE FORCE*. OR AT LEAST, A FEW OF THEM DO...



The highly detailed visual style seems to have remained.



"Give me back my bratwurst, Gunther!"



He could use the A-Team right now.

THE FOURTH instalment in the much-loved *Commandos* series is fast approaching release, with the WWII franchise ditching its trademark strategy-cum-puzzler format to take a radically different direction. As reported previously in *PC ZONE*, *Commandos: Strike Force* is going to be (surprise, surprise) a first-person shooter.

While the prospect of yet another FPS set in every game developer's favourite conflict might not fill you with excitement, *Strike Force* will reportedly bring a few unique features to the already overloaded table. Still in the capable Spanish manos of *Commandos* creator Pyro Studios, the game will allow you to step into the boots of three members of the original team: the Green Beret, the Sniper and the Spy.

Each of these boasts strengths and weaknesses (the Green Beret's forte is close combat and heavy weapons – we'll trust you to work out what the other two are good at), and you'll have to make judicious use of these to get through the single-player missions. Better yet, the



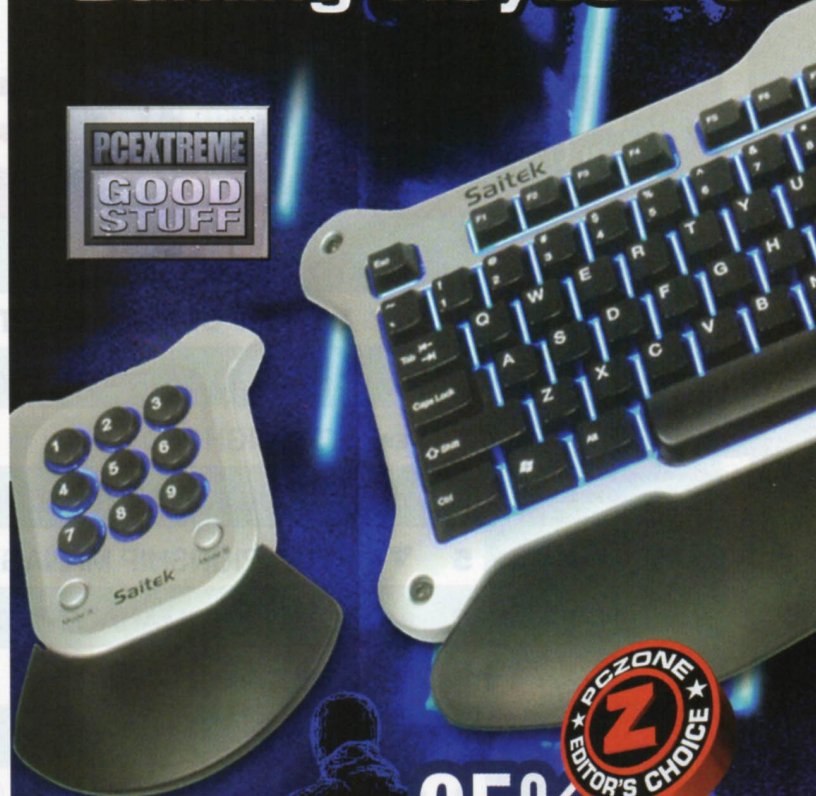
"This is absolutely the last time we travel by National Express!"

levels will feature multiple routes to make things feel more *Commandos-y*.

A 16-player multiplayer mode will also factor in somewhere, but Eidos and Pyro are currently keeping shtum with regards to details. It does all look a bit console-y though. More (as usual) as it happens.

- **Publisher:** Eidos
- **Developer:** Pyro Studios
- **ETA:** Q3 2005
- **Website:** www.commandosstrikeforce.com

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CHARTS

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Gosh Sam, if a hundred years of western civilisation have to be destroyed just to provide a bunch of smelly quasi-human chart creatures with a safe haven for their disgusting lifestyles, then so be it!



TOP 10



The unholy, evil game that's robbed PC ZONE members of sleep and sanity reigns supreme at number one. We kill things and make leathergoods on Draenor should anyone ever want to join in the carnage. Join us. Join us.



Did you know that Leeds Castle is actually in Kent? True story. We like castles, and that's why we like *Stronghold 2*. We also like forcing poor people to collect human excrement in carts. Another reason to like it.

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	RE	WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES	95%
2	-	THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY	EA	57%
3	NEW	STRONGHOLD 2	TAKE 2	85%
4	NEW	COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS	CDV	80%
5	▼	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS	50%
6	RE	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA	90%
7	▼	THE SIMS 2	EA	82%
8	NEW	LEGO STAR WARS	EIDOS	79%
9	NEW	THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA	70%
10	RE	HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES	97%



The Cossacks sound as if they're a mountain range, but actually they're thousands and thousands of little pixelated people who fight the French. And all credit to them as well. Especially when they get all the way up to number 4.



We love *LEGO Star Wars* simply for existing. It's short, yeah. And it's too easy. But you can't help but love the wee LEGO people chopping each other's limbs off. Episodes 4-6 next please, Traveller's Tales. Quick smart. Chop chop.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

I'm just waiting for EA to notice what's beating them and to announce *The World Of Warcraft* expansion pack.
JoeyJoJoJnr

LEGO Star Wars only at 8? People have no soul!
LiquidMetal

WOW, *Stronghold 2* and *Cossacks II* all in the top five – the time of the beard is upon us! Quake in fear, clean-shaven ones...
Doomus



TOP 10

1. WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES
2. EMPIRE EARTH 2	VU GAMES
3. COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS	DEEP SILVER
4. THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA
5. DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL	ACTIVISION
6. STRONGHOLD 2	TAKE 2
7. FREEDOM FORCE vs THE THIRD REICH	DIGITAL JESTERS
8. SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	UBISOFT
9. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS
10. GUILD WARS	NCSOFT

COMPETITION



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QUESTION: What are the Horde bull creatures known as in *World Of Warcraft*?

- A Minotaur
B Tauren
C Jersey

Send your answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 156, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: June 22, 2005

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

JUNE

AREA 51	MIDWAY
BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
BOILING POINT	ATARI
CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH	TAKE 2
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
MOTO GP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3	THQ
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3: SOAKED!	ATARI
WORMS 4: MAYHEM	SEGA

JULY

DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN	UBISOFT

AUGUST

BET ON SOLDIER	DIGITAL JESTERS
EARTH 2160	DEEP SILVER

Q3 2005

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY	SCI
CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR	SCI
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS	MICROSOFT
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
HALF-LIFE 2: AFTERMATH	VALVE SOFTWARE
HEART OF EMPIRE	DEEP SILVER
ROME: TOTAL WAR - BARBARIAN INVASION	ACTIVISION
STARGATE: SG1 - THE ALLIANCE	JOWOOD
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II	ACTIVISION
STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR	ACTIVISION
STUBBS THE ZOMBIE	ASPYR
TIMESHIFT	ATARI
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND	MIDWAY
X3: REUNION	DEEP SILVER

Q4 2005

AGE OF EMPIRES III	MICROSOFT
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
CALL OF DUTY 2	ACTIVISION
CIVILIZATION IV	TAKE 2
CONDEMNED	SEGA
FAHRENHEIT	ATARI
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY	EIDOS
KING KONG	UBISOFT
PREY	TAKE 2
RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR	MIDWAY
SPELLFORCE II: BLEND OF PERFECTION	JOWOOD
THE GODFATHER	EA
THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO	ATARI
TOCA RACE DRIVER 3	CODEMASTERS

2005

ADVENT RISING	TBA
BIOSHOCK	TBA
ENEMY IN SIGHT	ATARI
PSYCHONAUTS	TBA
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ

2006

HELLGATE: LONDON	NAMCO
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MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

GHOST RECON 2

Seeing as it was such a console-weighted title, it's no wonder that Clancy's spectral sequel has been nixed from the PC release schedule. Never mind though, the next offering is going to have you on your knees begging for a better graphics card.

- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: Red Storm
- ETA: August
- Website: www.ghostrecon.com



VIVISECTOR



Still no code? Sweet lord... this one's overdue. The only coverage we ever give it is in this damn column, and if it didn't involve the mangling of giant kittens then we probably wouldn't touch it with a big stick. We'll reserve judgement, but come on Action Forms. What's keeping you?

- Publisher: Brigades
- Developer: Action Forms
- ETA: Who knows?
- Website: www.vivisector.com

EARTH 2160

The outlandish, technical and thoroughly German *Earth 2160* clearly needs a few hundred extra keyboard commands slotted into its beautiful engine, as it's slunk back to August. So we'll be pleasantly bamboozled by its intricacies come autumn...

- Publisher: Deep Silver
- Developer: Reality Pump/Zuxxez
- ETA: August
- Website: www.earth2160.com



TOP 10 Least missed PC gaming platform icons

1. **COOL SPOT** (Sanctimonious little red prick, not cool at all)
2. **SKUNNY** (Idiot squirrel from *Skunny: Back To The Forest*)
3. **ALFRED CHICKEN** (Did we really play this? Willingly?)
4. **RICK DANGEROUS** (Indiana Jones' lawyers are on the phone...)
5. **DANGEROUS DAVE** (Rick Dangerous' lawyers are on the phone...)
6. **DJ PUFF** (The biker dragon from *DJ Puff's Volcanic Capers*. You couldn't make it up.)
7. **JILL OF THE JUNGLE** (From the makers of *Unreal Tournament*. Honestly.)
8. **NINJA RABBIT** (Did what you'd expect. Hardcore bunny violence.)
9. **VINYL GODDESS FROM MARS** (Brought sex to the platform masses)
10. **YO! JOE!** (Yo! Joe! Beat The ghosts! Or you could just piss off.)



IS THERE A GAMING CHART YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HERE? SEND IT IN AND IF WE PRINT IT, YOU'LL GET A PC ZONE GOODIE BAG!

SOURCE: UN Trial for crimes against 2D animals that walk back and forth next to ladders.



RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR

Togas, triremes and titans – *Rise & Fall* is about to get historical on all our arses...

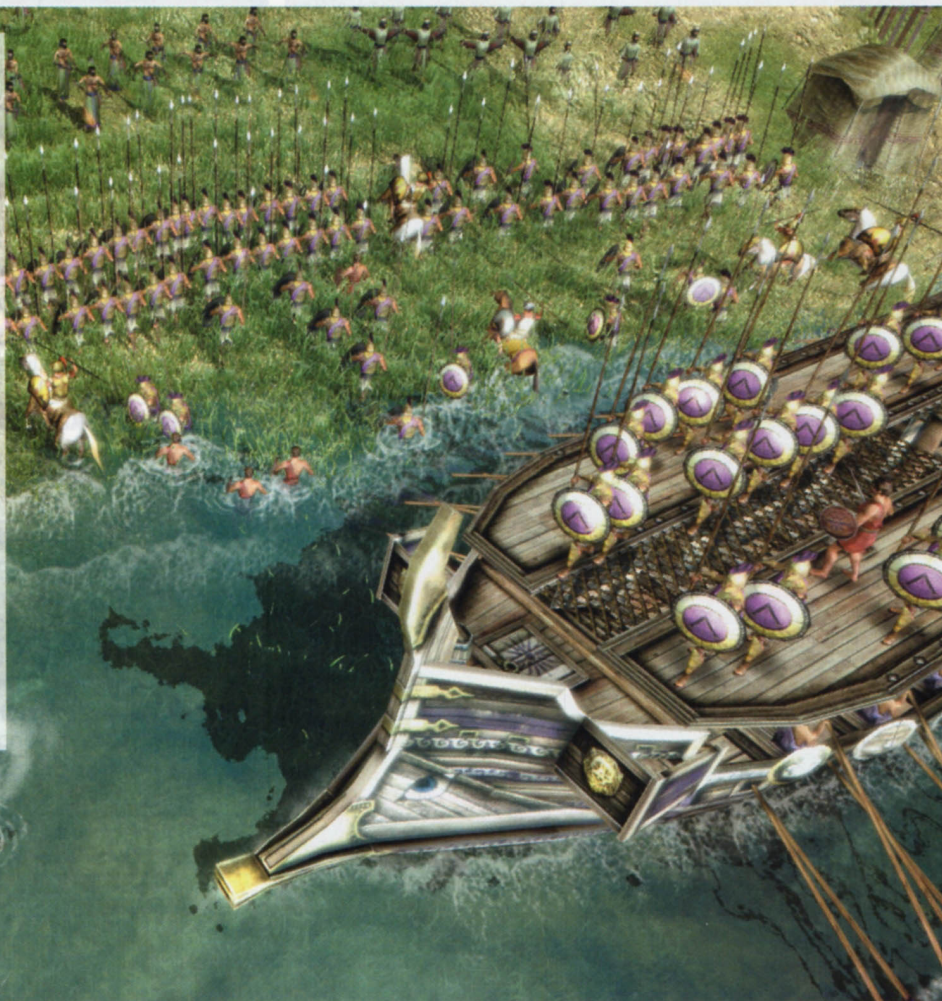
IF ROME: TOTAL WAR is an epic in the vein of *Spartacus* or *Cleopatra*, Stainless Steel Studios' upcoming *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War* is a Michael Bay-directed, Jerry Bruckheimer-produced sword 'n' sandals actionfest, complete with larger-than-life celebrities of the ancient world who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty in battle – historical accuracy be damned.

This stellar cast includes Ramses and Alexander (the Greats), Julius Caesar, Achilles and the aforementioned Queen of the Nile. Plus, in an innovative move by the developer, you'll be able to control each of these titans directly, wading into combat in a third-person stylee.

In terms of its core gameplay, this RTS will bear little resemblance to *Rome: Total War*. You recruit men and war machines one at a time rather than by the unit, you construct the mighty cities yourself, brick by brick (or building by building, at least), and last but certainly not least, you participate in the detailed real-time naval battles that *Rome* so sorely missed. Boarding actions, ship-on-ship ramming and the option to outfit boats with all manner of different war machines are all covered.

The game is certain to look utterly beautiful to boot – as you can see from these exclusive shots. We can't wait to mount an elephant and get stuck in.

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Stainless Steel Studios
■ ETA: Q4 2005 ■ Website: www.stainlesssteelstudios.com





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Living in an Immaterial World

What's better? Fact or fantasy? Will Porter tries it both ways

For the past few weeks, Will Porter has led a bizarre double life. By day he is a somewhat hapless games journalist, yet by night, an amazing transformation occurs. He becomes a lithe, attractive young elven huntress known as ElfieMoon, ever alert for

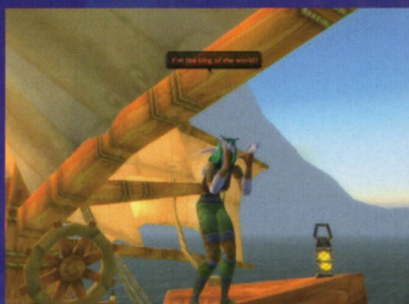
the call to action. But which path should he follow? That of commuting, smog and microwaved food? Or should he go the way of woodland mystery, gender confusion and the smiting of beasts? Which is best? Time to choose.



CASE STUDY #1: WAITING FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

ElfieMoon misses the boat to Darnassus by a mere fraction of a second. Cursing her luck, she attempts to strike up conversation with another traveller in her fey but spirited way – unfortunately he's German, and as such doesn't react to small talk about his giant tiger. A stranger knits her a new bag to keep bits of dead animals in. The boat eventually turns up, and Elfie stands on its bow and has a bit of a "I'm king of the world!" moment. **4/5**



REAL WORLD

Will misses the number 30 bus by a mere fraction of a second. He swears under his breath. Staring into space for a full five minutes, his only real occupation is mentally running through the greatest hits of Nirvana, briefly punctuated by a few thoughts on *Doctor Who*. Ten minutes later, he becomes paranoid that a nearby biker in an orange construction jacket is going to mug him. When the bus finally arrives the scary man sits next to him all the way to Marble Arch. **1/5**

VERDICT: The Government could pick up a few tips from Blizzard regarding both matters of timetabling and vagrancy.

CASE STUDY #2: POTION-DRINKING

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Whenever ElfieMoon is feeling a bit low, she drinks one of many invigorating potions that she has either plucked from the corpse of an enemy, or been given by one of her alchemist friends. In the real world this is known as drug dealing, and often leads to imprisonment or the involvement of Social Services. Here, though, an Elixir of Stamina boosts ElfieMoon's performance with

no apparent drawbacks.

It does, however, act as a

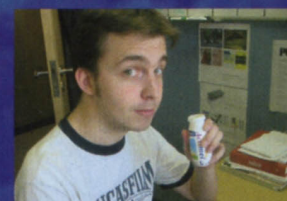
gateway potion towards more

illicit substances such as the Elixir of Dream Vision and Mighty Troll's Blood Potion. **4/5**



REAL WORLD

The closest Will gets to ElfieMoon's substance abuse is in the purchase and consumption of a delicious Actimel yoghurt drink. With its mythical L.casei Imunitass® culture, the results of ingestion are said to encourage both roller-blading and the embarrassment of school-children when picked up from school – unfortunately Will feels the urge to do neither. It does taste quite nice. Secretly though, Will wishes he'd bought a bottle of Yop instead. **2/5**



VERDICT: ElfieMoon may well suffer from her wild abandon in later life, but right now she's a winner.

CASE STUDY #3: OPENING THINGS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

ElfieMoon crouches down to retrieve some cash and three lumps of Darnassian Bleu cheese from a chest. She doesn't actually open it, but instead concentrates on it so hard that a load bar appears in front of her. She waits a meaningless number of seconds before receiving her paltry pickings. In the meantime she is attacked by a wolf. **1/5**

REAL WORLD

Will opens a cardboard box by using a pair of scissors to cut through the parcel tape, before simply ripping off the top due to his growing impatience. He receives a big box full of games. At no stage is he attacked by a wolf. **5/5**

VERDICT: When opening a box, make sure you're in the real world and not in the presence of wolves.





CASE STUDY #4: BEING ATTACKED BY TWO THINGS AT ONCE



WORLD OF WARCRAFT:

ElfieMoon is a lean, mean killing machine. Enemies walk strange linear paths in random directions wherever she goes, and she does her level best to kill every one of them. Whenever more than one attack her, however, she is absolutely and fundamentally useless. She runs away like the girl she is and dies. As a floating spirit she returns to her corpse, only to get killed by the same enemies on her revival. After a period of time this becomes frustrating. **2/5**

REAL WORLD:

Working in central London, Will is rarely attacked by any creature, let alone more than one of them. The most dangerous enemies that cross his path are bees. Like ElfieMoon, should more than one attack him he has a tendency to run away. However, he has never been killed when pursuing such an activity. The strange squeaking noises he makes in the process, however, have lost him street cred on occasion. **3/5**

VERDICT: There are pros and cons in both cases.

Bees by www.gillesgonthier.com

CASE STUDY #5: FLIRTING WITH A STRANGER, TAKING ALL YOUR CLOTHES OFF AND DANCING FOR MONEY IN A LEWD WAY



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

ElfieMoon is out killing things when she encounters a supple young elf named Catibrie. They team up and, despite the trappings of gender, really hit it off. Milady compliments Elfie on her bow skills, Elfie points out how hard it is making your way in the world as an elvish huntress. Catibrie agrees and blows ElfieMoon some kisses. Then they strip naked and dance coquettishly outside the settlement of Dolanaar. Catibrie demands cash from bystanders, and Elfie is willing to give anything a try. A man on a giant mechanical chicken gives her 50 whole silver pieces. Everything turns into a kind of crazy, sexy elvish disco, and a male warrior decrees himself ElfieMoon's pimp. At no stage does any of this seem remotely disturbing. **5/5**

REAL WORLD

In the real world Will would not even dare to chat up someone of the same or opposite sex and do sexy dances with them, since he would be ritually castrated by his girlfriend of three years. Even if he were to partake in such an activity, he certainly would not advertise that fact in a magazine read by over 50,000 people. This case is therefore rendered null and void. **N/A**

VERDICT: Not applicable in any way, sense or form.



CASE STUDY #6: GOING TO THE PUB

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

After a hard day of going into caves and killing creatures with big teeth until she gets to kill the leader of the creatures with big teeth, ElfieMoon likes nothing more than to retire to her local inn. Here she repairs her armour, drinks a flask of refreshing spring water, and has a long think about tomorrow's quests. The next morning she feels revitalised and truly in harmony with the forest around her. Everything she does she receives extra experience for, everything is worthwhile, everything is right with the world. **5/5**

REAL WORLD

After a hard day of sitting in front of a computer screen and drinking industrial strength coffee, Will likes nothing more than to retire to the local pub. Here he eats crisps, drinks what he describes as 'cheap cooking lager', and bitterly slags off work-mates that he feels particularly aggrieved with. As the evening progresses his arms move in an ever more gesticulatory manner. He may or may not be sick. The next morning he feels like death itself. He gets no extra experience points whatsoever, but does get fur on his tongue. **1/5**

VERDICT: Azeroth wins on all counts.



FINAL VERDICT

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: 16/25
REAL WORLD: 12/25

World Of Warcraft is better than life. By the time you read this ElfieMoon will be level 40 at least. Hooray for Blizzard! God bless the ancient race of Night Elves! Praise be the anonymity of online gaming!







Welcome to the future...

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

World exclusive! Anthony Holden travels to North Carolina to check out the new *UT* and see first-hand how Epic plans to take over the world...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Epic Games

PUBLISHER Midway

WEBSITE www.unrealtournament.com
ETA 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *UT* + UE3 = OMFG
- Preposterously detailed visuals
- All the old gameplay restored and tweaked
- New game type with huge battlefields and RTS elements
- Did we mention the phenomenal graphics?

WHEN WE arrive in Raleigh, North Carolina, the Epic Games team is out celebrating the release of its latest title, *Unreal Championship 2* on Xbox. It's the seventh game in the *Unreal* canon, not counting add-ons and special editions, and there's an air of satisfaction and some relief that it's finally out the door. "We finished this son of a bitch," bawls one ponytailed developer, raising a bottle in shaky salute.

"They're all sons of bitches by the time you've done with them," explains Mark Rein, Epic's preposterously enthusiastic vice-president and chief evangelist.

To host the festivities, Epic has booked out a modish local bar and filled the

place with ponytails, designer sandals and goatee beards – gang colours of the games developer. Two huge 10ft-tall screens project the new game from the far corner of the bar, casting a bluish glow across the revelling crowd.

The team is clearly in high spirits; but you get the feeling it's not just because they've shipped a game, nor indeed the ill-advised slugs of Jagermeister sunk earlier in the night. Beyond all this, there's simply a pervading sense of excitement here – perhaps tinged with disbelief – at their incredible good fortune.

MY EVIL PLAN WORKED!

You see, Epic Games is taking over the world. From being just one player in the engine licensing business a couple of years ago, Unreal Engine 3 all of a sudden appears to stand uncontested as the clear choice for next-gen games development. *Doom 3* and *Source* have made few inroads, LithTech has all but





Someone's just called him 'Malc'.

Comes complete with optional Blaupunkt CD player.

vanished and the only other real contender, RenderWare, has fallen into the jealous hands of EA.

"We're really excited about showing off the Unreal Engine 3 stuff at E3 this year," says producer Jeff Morris matter-of-factly. "We've got the best technology, the best graphics, the best tools. It's very cool to be working on."

Like few other developers, Epic has the luxury of making games under its own terms and with almost no external pressures – unless you count a legion of baying, diehard fans. The next project for the veteran outfit is a new *Unreal Tournament*. It's the first PC game to harness the dazzling power of the third Unreal Engine, and if it's in any way reflective of the company's fortunes right now, we're going to have to pinch ourselves to believe it's real.

EARLY DAYS

A combination of sore heads and jetlag means a late start the next day. "That's pretty much a typical Monday night for us," laughs Steve Polge, lead designer and lead programmer on *UT2007*.

We sit in the boardroom of the Epic offices, in a typical American office-block in a leafy Raleigh suburb.

"The game's still pretty early. We've only been working on it full-time for three months. We figure it'll be out some time in 2006, so at the moment we're calling it *UT2007*, but that could change. We might not do numbers."

"We've got the best technology, the best graphics and the best tools. It's a very cool game to be working on"

JEFF MORRIS PRODUCER, *UT2007*

"Our first aim was to get all the *UT2004* stuff up and running in Unreal Engine 3, which we've pretty much done," continues Morris. "Right now, we've got Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, CTF, Onslaught and Survival, which is sort of a 1-on-1 Deathmatch. It's pretty amazing that we've got every game type from *UT2004* running in such a short time."

Polge boots up the projector and brings up the new 'Malcolm' character model seen on these pages. We've seen it before, but the effect is still stunning. "We're already starting to have some beautiful assets come online. It's starting to come together and show what the game's going to look like."

SIMPLY STUNNING

You can see for yourself what that means. We could quote poly counts and tech specs all day, but the simple fact is it looks amazing. In two years time such mind-boggling imagery may well be the norm, but right now every UE3 game we see – *Gears Of War*, *UT2007* – we get a nosebleed just thinking about what's to come. Like Morris says, right now no-one else can come close. As for gameplay of course, this is *UT*, and it seems Epic very much wants to continue where it left off.

"We're focusing a lot of our development on what we call the classic

game types and really trying to refine those," says Steve Polge. "We're spending a lot of time tweaking the tiniest details. We have these esoteric arguments about whether or not jump height should be four units higher and things like that. We're tweaking movement, weapons, just making sure everything feels really solid for DM and

CTF. They'll be the modes we most focus on, but we're going to add a lot of

new kinds of supporting features too, like automatic matchmaking based on skill rating – similar to Battle.net."

This emphasis on proven game types may sound pedestrian, but the philosophy very much seems to start with established ideas and rely on the power of the new engine to transform them. With CTF for example, there will now be maps with vehicles, using streaming level technology to make

FAKING IT

FEIGNED DEATH MAKES A WELCOME RETURN IN *UT2007*

If you remember the original *UT*, you'll no doubt recall one of its more quirky features – the ability to feign death. It was a nice idea, though it often ended up being more comical than practical, owing to the fact that the animation was exactly the same every time. You'd throw your hands up and collapse in an insincere heap, all too aware that an experienced player could see through your performance in an instant.

In *UT2007*, however, it will be a different story. The new Novodex physics engine enables bodies to switch to and from a ragdoll state at will, meaning your fainting fits will look exactly like any other genuine ragdoll death.

"Ideally," says lead designer and lead programmer Steve Polge, "you want to time it right. So when a guy hits you with a rocket and almost kills you, you quickly feign death, then wait till he turns around and walks away to jump up again." The sneaky swine. We like his style...



You'll now fight against the Necris aliens from the original *UT*.



As always, the game will ship with a complete dev kit for modders.

STING IN THE TAIL

THE SCORPION GETS A RETROFIT

All the vehicles from *UT2004* are set to return in *UT2007*, and while most will simply be more detailed versions of their original incarnations, one or two are receiving a bit more attention.

So far, the vehicle with the most significant improvements is the Scorpion, the little buggy with the spring-loaded death blades. "What we've added is rocket boosters," says lead designer and programmer Steve Polge. "You can use them if you're charging somebody down, for example, as well as for doing jumps – and you can get a whole lot of air off these things. The other thing that's cool is that if you leave the vehicle when the rocket boosters are on, it engages a self-destruct and blows up seconds later. You can use this for making a run at enemy power cores and it gives the Scorpion a chance against the tank." Not to mention a great way of turning up to a party.



Utility vehicle and bomb in one tidy package.





environments ten times bigger than previously possible. With Deathmatch, there will be levels littered with physics objects, where it becomes more about knocking things over on a player's head than shooting him with a rocket launcher.

"We're only planning on doing that in a couple of maps, just to see if it's fun," says Jeff Morris. "When you start to give the player the ability to block doorways and change pathways it becomes a completely different game. But we like to have a real variety of gameplay in our maps in *UT*, so we'll definitely try that."

THE NEW ASSAULT

"Of course we're bringing Onslaught back as well," picks up Polge. "And again we're making refinements to that. Probably the biggest new addition is the second vehicle team. On top of the nine vehicles that shipped between *UT2004* and the bonus pack, we'll have another

set of nine vehicles that are kind of analogous but different in functionality."

What shape these will take is still very much up in the air, but Steve Polge makes some vague noises about a robotic walker, "not in the mech tradition, but more insectoid". The vision is perhaps to create a more alien counterpoint to the very earthly designs of the existing set.

"The biggest thing however," he continues, "the thing we're most excited about in terms of cool new stuff is the new game type. Internally, we've been calling it 'Conquest'. I'd say it's the successor to Assault, but it's kind of Assault-meets-Onslaught. The idea is to have a big battlefield, with shifting front lines and zones of control – we want to channel the action into certain areas so you don't have people spread out all over the place. We'll have all the vehicles from Onslaught, and in addition to that

we're adding some RTS concepts like resources to give it a little more depth."

WE'VE GOT THE POWER

For veterans of games like *Savage*, this will come as no revelation. However, Epic is being very careful to avoid the frankly dull aspects of that game, making sure to retain the 'instant action' feel that very much defines *UT* – you spawn and straight away you're shooting people, not tottering off to mine resources. Instead, you'll simply capture some sort of station that, once powered up, automatically deploys little harvesting robots.

"We have just one resource – tarydium," says Polge. "The idea is that it powers your bunkers. The rate at which vehicles rebuild is based on the amount of tarydium divided by the number of bunkers – so the more bunkers you control, the more resources you need."

"We want it so you don't have to play with resources, but a team that does play the resource game will have certain advantages," says Jeff Morris. "Either way, it introduces two new verbs into the game, which are 'protect my resource gatherers' and 'attack the enemy's resource gatherers'."

On top of that, Conquest will also have objectives, again mimicking the old Assault blueprint. As you push forward and take control of certain bunkers, missions will pop up both for your team and your opponents. "They're sort of mirrored," says Morris, "so it might be 'defend this bridge' for one team and 'attack it' for the other. The missions will focus the battle on these hot-spots, though if you just want to try and capture bunkers and push your front line, you can do that too."

Another part of the strategy involves the introduction of deployable items,



such as spy robots and automated turrets. The idea is to give you a greater range of roles to play, like spy, commando and engineer, without going as far as creating specific character classes.

TOTAL DOMINATION

"Another aspect is the commander role," continues Morris, "which any sort of RTS-meets-first-person-shooter game flirts with. It's not as elaborate as *Savage*, where you have to have a commander, a research tree and all that. We want a sort of mid-level commander role, who has some overview of the battle and who's able to facilitate collaboration."

Interestingly, the aim is not to pull the commander out of the world and give him a top-down view as in *BF2*, but to keep him very much within the game. It would be a role you could step into and out of as easily as, say, picking up a scoped rifle and deciding to be a sniper.

WARFARE ART THOU?

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO UNREAL WARFARE...?

Unless you're new to PC games or have the memory capacity of a Commodore 64, you'll recognise the name *Unreal Warfare* as one of the unsolved mysteries of PC gaming. A 'secret project' that never materialised, the title was meant to be Epic's next big evolution of the *Unreal* franchise, but talk of it faded with the release of *UT2003* and *UT2004*, and most eventually dismissed it as vapourware.

So what was this mysterious game? Some have speculated that it never existed; others claim Epic programmer Tim Sweeney binned the game in a jealous rage after he got his first look at *Doom 3*. Clearly there's more to the story, and having snuck the subject into conversation over a few beers with Epic employees, we think we can put the matter to rest.

First, the game definitely existed at one time. It's no longer in development, but there is some continuity, in both concept and technology, between *Unreal Warfare* and the new Epic games. The Xbox 360 title *Gears Of War* owes some debt to the project, however small, but the clearest legatees of the original *Warfare* vision are the *UT2004* bonus pack and the Conquest mode planned for *UT2007*, which apparently takes a lot of its ideas from the abandoned project. So now you know.



CREATIVE JUICES

SOME OF EPIC'S MORE OUTLANDISH IDEAS FOR THE NEW UT...

UT2007 is still in a state of design flux – there are a lot of ideas being tossed around and not all of them are going to make it into the mix – but we thought we'd let you in on a couple anyway. One of our favourites is the notion of a personal hoverboard for Onslaught mode. Carried as a default item, it would be a nimble, *Back To The Future*-esque affair, enabling you to zoom around the map far quicker than walking.

The disadvantage is that you can't shoot while in motion, though a related idea is to combine the hoverboard with a grappling device for hooking on to passing vehicles (or people). If you've read *Snow Crash* you'll recognise the inspiration.

Another idea is to use the new materials system to create a jelly-like deployable shield. If you've seen the UE3 demo videos from GDC you might have seen this stuff – it's a physical gel that enables objects to move through it, but only slowly and with a lot of squelching. Used as deployable, it could set traps or block doorways.

It's some crazy stuff, which makes us all the more upset Epic didn't like our idea for a jelly wrestling mini-game. Next time...



"We're still figuring out exactly how we'll do it," admits Steve Polge, "but maybe there's some bunkers that are command bunkers, where there are screens displaying various information about the battle. Being a commander just means you choose to go there and monitor these screens, then convey the information to your team."

Like the other game modes, Conquest will take advantage of the power of UE3 to produce some unprecedented effects. Not only will the battlefield be vast, with streaming levels and no loading times, but the appearance of the terrain will alter as the battle rages back and forth. For example, as territory moves from human control into the hands of the evil Necris (alien baddie replacements for the Skaarj), the ground will blacken, grass will wither and trees will corrupt out of shape. "Hopefully it will be a stunning transformation," says Morris, "but it also means you'll be able to eyeball the map to see who controls what. It's an elegant and visually interesting way of doing that."

GREY POWER

At this point we're very much ready to see the game in action, so without further chat, lead level designer Jim Brown fires up one of the new maps. Sitting back, I grip

the sides of my chair and prepare to be blown away. Unfortunately, there's not a lot to see. The level is uniformly grey and boxlike, with no textures, minimal detail and not an enemy in sight.

"Remember, the programming is significantly ahead of the art," laughs producer Jeff Morris. "It's not pretty right now – we do this first to get the gameplay right. We've always had a rule with *UT* – it has to be playable every day, and when it's just basic cubes and basic shapes like this, it's really easy to change on-the-fly and then test again."

"This map is a good example," adds Brown. "This is Deck16, a map that's appeared in every iteration of *UT*. It's a very familiar space and it helps us gauge how the game actually feels."

This dedication to playtesting is clearly a sound policy, and one that pays huge dividends in the final product; but I'm nonetheless relieved when Brown loads up a slightly more advanced map. Still a work in progress, it does at least display some of the detail and intricacy we expect from a new *UT*. "Once we're happy with the gameplay, we start building up detail in a map and working with the art team to create a theme. Just as an example of how things are going, this hallway has... Well... Considerably more polygons than an entire map used to. I'd venture to say two to three times more than an entire map in *UT2004*."

Brown hands over the controls and I run around for a while, admiring the elaborate architecture and cycling through the weapons to see what's changed. Already, most of the original weapons are in place, but meticulously remodelled to match the complexity of their surroundings. Nothing wholeheartedly new just yet though.

"We haven't spent a lot of time thinking about what we're going to do for new weapons yet," confesses Brown, "but we'll definitely have a lot of new stuff. Right now the question is whether it's going to be in the form of new weapons or things like deployables."

One thing that has been done to expand the weapon repertoire is enhancing the functionality of the target painter, originally used to bring down an ion cannon blast. Now, thanks to the new Kismet scripting system, Epic is encouraging its level designers to create a range of level-specific 'super-weapon' effects for the target painter. In one level, for instance, you'll be able to set off an earthquake, sending hundreds of boulders crashing down from the hills around you. In another, it may cause a roof to collapse, a dam to break or the earth to split asunder. All of which are better than a new rocket launcher any day.

RISE OF THE MACHINES

"The other big thing we're focusing on is really enhancing the AI," continues Polge, dropping a couple of generic bots into the level as he does so. "Our bots are already smarter and play better than in *UT2004*, but we're going to take them much further, both from the point of view of making them better players, but also giving them more personality."

"The main reason is we want to have a much richer and more interesting single-player," adds Morris. "It's a big focus for us, because although everyone thinks of *UT* as a multiplayer game, there's a huge percentage of people who buy our games who never go online. It's surprising, but a lot of people are buying the game just to play against bots."

This is clearly a tricky dilemma for the designers. They want to make the



single-player game better for people playing offline, but at the same time they want to encourage as many as possible to go online, where the real action is. Commendably, their answer seems to be to make both experiences as attractive as possible. Even in *UT2004*, the solo game was perhaps the best facsimile of the online experience available, and it's only going to get better in *UT2007*.

CLEVER CLOGS

"We've spent a lot of time on very good, competitive, human-seeming AI," boasts Morris. "You look at most multiplayer games, their AI is atrocious. You look at recent FPS games, they cloak their bad AI in zombies. Basically, nobody really seems to be taking AI seriously for offline."

The way Epic proposes to improve things is to endow its bots with personalities and characters that you learn over time. The aim is to make the interaction with bots much more like you're playing with a bunch of guys in the same room. As Morris explains: "Instead of

just throwing out random taunts, they'll be telling you 'there's a sniper on the tower' and some other bot will say 'OK, I'll take him out'. They'll talk to each other and give each other info that you can pick up on. Or you can yell out orders yourself. We'll have a voice menu like always, but we'll also make really heavy use of voice command."

Voice control was of course supported in *UT2004*, but it was a slightly tacked-on element and not particularly well documented. Morris insists this is about to change. "We think voice control is the coolest feature for controlling AI to come around in a long time. And what we're hoping to do is take that technology and add an almost text-adventure-style conversational structure, where you can really talk to your bot and have your bot talk back to you. You're not going to be able to use a full sentence and have it understand it, but we're going to take it to the point where you'll have some sort of conversational vibe with it."

It may sound far-fetched, but this remarkable innovation is apparently not a technical challenge at all. Most of the info required to negotiate a simple conversation is already being processed by the AI, and it's just a matter of presenting it better in an interface where you can take advantage of it. The thought of being able to converse with bots, even in a limited capacity, is pretty amazing, and could have serious implications for the way we play games.

WORLD OF TOMORROW

Unfortunately, like a lot of the game, it's too early to see it in action. Playing *Unreal Tournament 2007* at the moment is more tantalising than anything – it feels very much like the old *UT*, and only

occasionally looks anything like the graphical tour de force it's set to become.

Needless to say, we're not in the least bit concerned. With the best technology, the best graphics and one of the most consistent track records in the industry, it would be a spectacular upset if the next *UT* was anything other than great. The basic concept may be the same as ever (as one Epic staffer jokes, "it's just people jumping around shooting each other"), but even the few small enhancements we've seen in Raleigh are enough to convince us that Epic is leading the way into some incredibly exciting territory for PC gaming. **EW**



THE WAIT IS OVER



The days of the loading screen are numbered.

NO MORE LOADING, NO MORE DISCONNECTS

Seamless streaming of levels – it's a term we hear a lot these days, but one that's going to bring the most tangible benefits yet in *UT2007*. Not only does the streaming function of Unreal Engine 3 allow for much (much!) bigger and more detailed worlds, it's going to make a real difference to the way we play online games.

Lead designer and programmer Steve Polge explains: "Right now, when you finish a game of CTF, everyone disconnects and spends a minute looking at a loading screen. That's a real loss of an opportunity to chat about the last match, talk about what you want to do for the next match and so on. Plus, when you get back into the game, you might not be on the same team as the people you were playing with, so there's a real loss of continuity there too. With streaming levels, what we're able to do is seamlessly load the new level while you're still hanging out in the old level discussing scores and tactics. And then when everyone's ready you just hit go, and everyone jumps into the new level."



Enemy aircraft!

Yeah, those shin pads will make all the difference.

Planes, trains and automobiles... BATTLEFIELD 2

Finally, hands-on with the greatest squad-based shooter of the year.
Paul Presley dusts off his flak jacket and copy of Sun Tzu's *Art Of War*

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
152

IT'S MY JAMES Bond moment. I'm a sniper, a lone wolf, operating on my own agenda, aiding the fight for control in the Gulf Of Oman in my own special way. Bedecked in camouflage netting and hoisting my rifle,

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.battlefield2.com
ETA Summer 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Same great *Battlefield* gameplay, great new *Battlefield* engine
- More 'action moments' than you can shake a stick at
- Squad leaders and Commanders bringing order to chaos
- So close now we can smell the cordite

I've scaled the heights of a giant crane, towering over all, perched at the highest edge and scanning for targets.

But they've noticed me. One kill too many added to my total score. A helicopter gunship, bristling with cannons and missiles, bears down on my position and unleashes a speculative volley of fire towards me. Camouflage netting is fine in the bush, but something of a giveaway when surrounded by steel and pipes.

I'm on my feet in an instant, not waiting for a second burst, and running – sprinting – for the opposite end of the crane's arm just as the gunship fires again. Two seconds, three seconds, then the edge of the crane is upon me, opening to the skies ahead, beckoning to the cold, hard ground hundreds of feet below. The pilot finds the missile controls and an

explosion rocks the top of the crane. But I've already jumped...

MAN OMAN

Gasps, cries, utterances of disbelief. I haven't forgotten the watching audience and I'm playing them like a master storyteller, holding their attention in the palm of my hands even while their hearts are in the roofs of their mouths. This is *Battlefield 2* you see, the first time playable code has been released to the press, and there isn't a member of *ZONE* that isn't crowded around the office games PC, watching my exploits and living every moment as though they were at the controls themselves.

We've all been waiting for this for a long time. We've seen presentations, attended strictly controlled press tours,

but this is the first time we've actually been given fully working code to explore for ourselves. Only one map, the Gulf Of Oman, but packed with tanks, jeeps, APCs, buggies, helicopters, gunships, jet fighters, aircraft carriers and zodiac boats – as well as all the weapon loadouts and command systems and persistent player rankings we've been promised over the past six months.

Two sides, Americans and the Middle East Coalition, fighting over a handful of control points, spread amongst mid- to low-level buildings, inlet rivers, bridges, coastlines and a railway with a stalled train acting as a mid-map separator.

HIGH POINTS

The ground rushes towards me as the novice gunship pilot struggles to both

reacquire his target and avoid crashing headfirst into the crane's tower. The ground, followed by certain death, (followed by a 15-second wait to respawn back on the beach), 007's done for this time for sure. Except for a split second later when a sudden head jerk follows the unfolding of a life-saving parachute, to yelps of surprise and delight from the onlookers. The master storyteller, playing their emotions like a fiddle. A gentle, controlled descent back towards the safety of friendly lines as the pilot loses the fight for control above, clips the rotors on the boom arm and plunges into the ground and respawn menu below.

It's the greatest thing we've ever seen. At least, it is until a bit later on when I discover the jet fighters sitting on the

carrier decks have an alternative hover mode by pointing the rotating engine downwards. Then that becomes the greatest thing we've ever seen until a bit later than that when, as a medic, I finally manage to successfully use the defibrillators to shock and stun an unaware enemy.

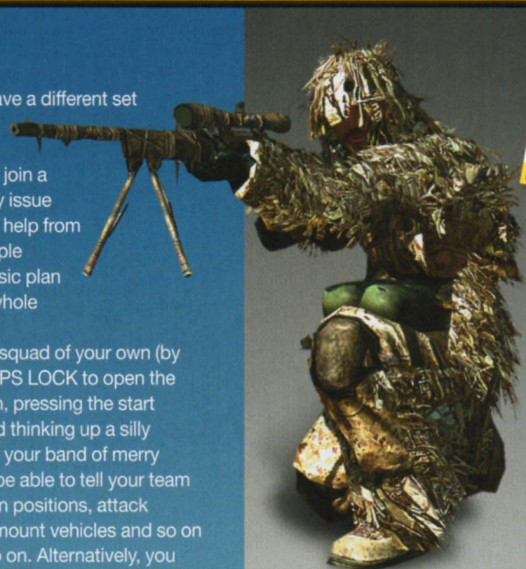
HOW HIGH

So the wow factor is all present and correct, what of the promised meat on those bones? Namely, how well does that much anticipated command system actually work in the cold light of day? As expected, all soldiers get to deploy a radial menu in the field, although depending on how far up the chain of command you've managed to inveigle

yourself, you'll have a different set of commands to choose from.

Basic grunts that join a squad can simply issue plaintive cries for help from their betters, simple requests for a basic plan of action in this whole goddam war.

Opt to start a squad of your own (by simply hitting CAPS LOCK to open the command screen, pressing the start squad button and thinking up a silly enough name for your band of merry men), and you'll be able to tell your team to move to certain positions, attack different points, mount vehicles and so on and so on and so on. Alternatively, you



CV



DICE

Sweden. Invented in 1922. Built mainly from discarded bubble wrapping. Migrates southwards every summer to Africa. Yes, Sweden is notable for many things, but perhaps most importantly of the lot is DICE, creator of the *Battlefield* series. Here's a potted history for you...

1992 Early pinball games allow the plucky DICE-rs to carve out a reputation for gaming goodness. Various rally and touring car games follow.

2000 The DICE-onauts come up with *Codename: Eagle*, setting the blueprint for the *Battlefield* games to follow.

2002 *Battlefield 1942* sees the DICE-aholics changing the shape of Internet gaming forever. Or something.

2004 Having been swallowed by the omnipresent Electronic Arts machine, the DICE-lings allow a spin-off studio to create *Battlefield Vietnam*, while working on the true sequel themselves.



Bet it doesn't run on unleaded.



"Oi, down in front."



"It's the greatest thing I've ever seen. At least, it is until a bit later on when I discover the jet fighters on the carrier decks have an alternative hover mode"



"Battlefield 2 honestly feels like it's setting a whole new benchmark for multiplayer online shooters"

AREA OF EFFECT



THE DRUGS DO WORK

One small but crucial difference to the way support classes work in-game, is that you no longer need to be directly hands-on to provide either ammo resupplies or medical aid. Having the appropriate player sitting in a nearby APC vehicle, or just standing next to a Commander-initiated supply drop, is enough to send out those positive waves and keep your battle-weary marine in tip-top fighting condition.

Should you need a house call though (let's say you've carelessly had your legs blown off by a passing grenade), the doctor will have to hop out of his protected environs and apply either a handy medical pack if you just find yourself running low, or the now legendary shock paddles if you're in a more serious state of near-death (you'll be given around 90 per cent of your respawn time for aid to get to you before you wind up pushing up daisies).

Damage isn't absolute either. Sometimes you'll be a write-off from the get-go (say an artillery shell lands on your head), sometimes you'll just get a touch of shellshock (blurry vision and tinnitus) but no lasting ill effects. Be careful out there, soldier.

can open the map, right-click somewhere and drop a command at will.

Which all sounds fine, except that at present it can be a bit fiddly. The radial menu takes some getting used to due to over-sensitive mouse responses, often leading to a request for artillery drops on your fallen comrade rather than a medic. It's not a major problem and is certainly something DICE can polish before the game gets to the shops.

INCOMING

Then there's the Commander mode. Run on a democratic basis, you put yourself up for command, and providing there are no objections or requests from higher-ranked players (see 'Medals Of Honour', right), suddenly you find yourself in charge of the whole shebang, the eyes of dozens awaiting your tactical wisdom and strategic nous.

A satellite map, a list of squads (Commanders can only order about

formed squads – individual soldiers are immune from the whole C&C hierarchy), and a bunch of commands for dropping supplies, sending out recon drones and dropping hot artillery death. These are the tools of your trade although presently, as with the squad leader controls, the menus could use a touch of smartening up, a few UI tweaks here and there to make things a little clearer than they are. Plus the real-time map never quite seems to zoom to quite the level you need – it's either just too near to get a clear picture of an area, or just too far to clearly make out who's doing what.

Again, this is all stuff that DICE can, and is, still working on, although given time to figure it out and with players that communicate adequately, you can get quite an effective offensive movement going. Remember to watch your own position though, as all too often I was caught out by forgetting that the Commander is still a physical presence



I can see my house from here.

Bloody kids, they'll nick anything.

MEDALS OF HONOUR

PROFILE	JOIN GAME	CREATE GAME	AWARDS	OPTIONS	QUIT
PROFILE	STATS	AWARDS	ARMY STATS	MAP STATS	
PROFILE NAME	STATS	AWARDS	ARMY STATS	MAP STATS	
GENERAL INFORMATION	MOST PLAYED	VEHICLE CATEGORIES	HANDWEAPONS	MAP	
GLOBAL SCORE	KITS	ANTI-TANK	SUBMACHINE GUNS	GULF OF OMAN	
WINS	ANTI-TANK	TRANSPORT			
LOSSES					
TEAMWORK SCORE					
COMBAT SCORE					
COMMANDER SCORE					
#1 opponent					
#1 victim					
VOICE (Bolt/Hazard)					
TEAMWORK	COMBAT				
TEAMWORK SCORE					
CAPTURE CONTROLPOINT					
CAPTURE ASSIST					
DEFEND CONTROLPOINT					
KILL ASSIST					
HEAL					
REVIVE					
SUPPORT					
REPAIR					
DRIVER SCORE					
LOGOUT	ACTIVE PROFILE: PizzettiUK			PLAY NOW	

on each map – one that can be shot at and killed by the enemy.

AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX

There's not much in the way of physics on show, but the need to have maps work with up to 128 players dictates a limited approach on that front. As for the ground experience, despite the splendour of the all-new and incredibly impressive visuals – the sun-bleached lighting and detailed texturing bringing to life the world of combat in a way second only to *Half-Life 2* – it isn't long before I settled myself down into the comfortable pillow of traditional *Battlefield* gameplay.

Running from one capture point to the next, hopping in and out of passing tanks, jeeps and APCs, cursing the snipers who pick you off with supernatural precision, tense stand-offs as you wait for the enemy's flag to come down and yours to go up – all the classic feelings are there intact, but the added sense of tactical structure now means things tend to make far more sense in the field than before, opening the game up for newbies and removing the old *Battlefield* problem of old hands knowing exactly what to do on any given map while the rest of us get lost, shot at and dead-ed.

The enhancements certainly allow for the kind of thrilling exploits detailed earlier, meaning all those classic 'Battlefield moments' will be bigger and better than ever (narrowing down the many superb moments to the three listed above was a task in itself – this whole preview could easily have been a "and

MAKING THE WAR COUNT FOR SOMETHING

We'd been a little confused as to how exactly *BF2*'s ranking system was going to work, but now we've seen it in action, it's a relief to say that it works a treat. Play any game on a ranked server (and why would you do otherwise?) and you'll slowly amass experience points in a manner similar to most MMORPGs. Qualify for the next level and you'll be promoted, gain bonus weapons and be looked on more favourably if you apply for the Commander role on any map.

On top of that, you earn bonuses, medals and titles for actions performed in combat, with just about every stat you can think of being recorded, from which map you prefer playing on to how many times you pull out a knife.

then I did... And then I did... And then I did..."-type affair).

We just have to hope EA gives DICE the time needed to polish the areas that need tightening (no reason to think it won't). From our playtest, *Battlefield 2* honestly feels like it's setting a whole new benchmark for multiplayer online shooters. The genre may have been troubled recently by the likes of *Joint Ops* (or failed to have been by *Söldner*), but nothing quite has the weight and sheer lust factor as this. Exclusive review next issue!



I can bomb my house from here.



History today...

AGE OF EMPIRES III

Steve Hill embarks on an expedition to discover America, and finds Dallas...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ensemble Studios

PUBLISHER Microsoft

WEBSITE www.ensemblestudios.com

ETA End of 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Fancy 3D graphics
- New Home City feature
- Features Native Americans
- It's Age III...

CV

ENSEMBLE
STUDIOSENSEMBLE
STUDIOS

Formed just over ten years ago, Dallas-based Ensemble now numbers some 85 staff. It's exclusively made Age-based RTS games, and indeed sold 16 million of them...

- 1997** *Age Of Empires* sees Ensemble gamble the future of the studio. Fortunately it proves a resounding success, ensuring that the team don't have to get proper jobs after all.
- 1998** *Age Of Empires: The Rise Of Rome* is the inevitable expansion pack, demonstrating Ensemble's burgeoning penchant for diverse historical eras.
- 1999** *Age Of Empires II: The Age Of Kings* is the sequel proper, taking the RTS action into some new areas, boasting Chinese, Britons, Vikings and Goths.
- 2000** *Age Of Empires II: The Conquerors Expansion* does what it says on the box, adding five new civilisations, including the Mayans and Aztecs.
- 2002** *Age Of Mythology* proves a minor departure, with the traditional historical setting usurped by the likes of minotaurs and flying horses. As if.
- 2003** *Age Of Mythology: The Titans* continues the trend of hastily turned round expansion packs, this one adding the Atlanteans to the mix. No such place.

"THE GOAL is to make the best f***** game ever," says Ensemble technical director Dave 'Potty Mouth' Pottinger, before adding the caveat, "in terms of graphics". Considering that he's talking about a real-time strategy game, this is a particularly bold statement. For so long considered the ugly red-haired stepchild of the gaming family, Ensemble has decided that it's time for the RTS to fight back. Traditionally hidden away in the back of magazines near the personal ads, the developer has set out to create a game so visually stunning as to command front covers. And while we haven't quite afforded it that privilege, we did deign to visit its studios in Dallas, in between eating our own weight in dead cow.

While conforming to the stereotype of pasty men surrounded by action figures,

the Ensemble office differs in one key area, in so much as the lobby is designed to look like the bridge of the Starship Enterprise, with designs taken directly from the Star Trek Hilton in Vegas. Depending on your viewpoint, this either makes Ensemble "a real fun place to work" or deeply tragic.

The team seem happy enough though, and for the last two and a half years have been beaver away on *Age Of Empires III*, the latest incarnation of the classic strategy series. According to Ensemble lore, they were bucked into action by a magazine article claiming that the RTS is dead. As one of the pioneers of the genre, this was clearly perturbing, and so the team set about proving that rumours of its death were exaggerated. Following much internal discussion, the

developer decided the way forward was to create a game as visually compelling as the likes of *Half-Life 2* or *Doom 3*, while retaining the trademark *Age Of Empires* gameplay.

WATER WORLD

Taking on the first-person shooters on their own terms could be deemed madness, but Ensemble has gone about the task with fervour. Starting out with the engine from most recent release *Age Of Mythology*, a slew of programmers have been employed to improve the

graphics, including one committed individual who's spent an entire year on the water effects. Throw in the Havok physics engine and the ability to support over 100 characters on screen simultaneously, and it appears that Ensemble means business.

We've seen it in action with our own bleary eyes, and despite reeling from a triple-whammy of jetlag, meat and hard



A dawn attack can take the enemy by surprise. The idle twats.

liquor, have to admit to being impressed. The Ensemble team are pretty thrilled too, and during the presentation there were no less than ten mentions of the various levels of excitement, be it "really excited", the occasional "super-excited" and even a rogue "über-excited".

BEAR-BAITING

Their collective excitement is fair enough, and the game has to be seen to be appreciated. Whereas the average RTS could have been made any time in the last five years, *AOE3* looks bang up-to-date, despite the historical setting.

We won't bore you with the technical details – mainly because we don't understand them – but suffice to say that it achieves some impressive levels of realism. The sun beats down, the shadows are in the right place and the water reflects and ripples like a year's worth of tweaking suggests. Moreover, there's a unified wind system, whereby everything reacts to the wind consistently, be it fluttering flags, billowing smoke, the aforementioned water or a discarded packet of cheese & onion crisps. With tiny graphical details such as a man in a tree being menaced

by a bear, it's a particularly rich and vibrant place. As senior designer and Ensemble founder Bruce Shelley says, "It's a world you want to be in", if not necessarily while stuck up a tree being pawed by a grizzly.

Or indeed on the receiving end of a 12lb cannon ball. The cannon units are the game's big showstoppers, wreaking damage on a scale almost unprecedented



Ambush traders and steal their fruit.

in the genre. This is where the Havok physics come into their own, creating a convincing depiction of the effects of being struck by a fast-moving metallic sphere. Fire a cannon into a group of artillery, and rather than slump to the ground in a three-frame animation, they're individually tossed into the air like ragdolls, with their hats going one way and their guns another, while the cannonball itself rolls around the map in a somewhat dangerous fashion.

SLIDE AWAY

The effect on buildings is equally impressive, with a dynamic destruction system that acknowledges that a cannonball doesn't necessarily set fire to anything it hits, in direct contradiction of Hollywood conventions. Instead of the ubiquitous fire animations, enormous chunks of masonry will be blown out of the targeted building, which eventually collapses under its own weight. And should it be on the edge of a cliff, it may well slide into the water below, causing the relevant

"Whereas the average RTS could have been made any time in the last five years, *AOE3* looks bang up-to-date"



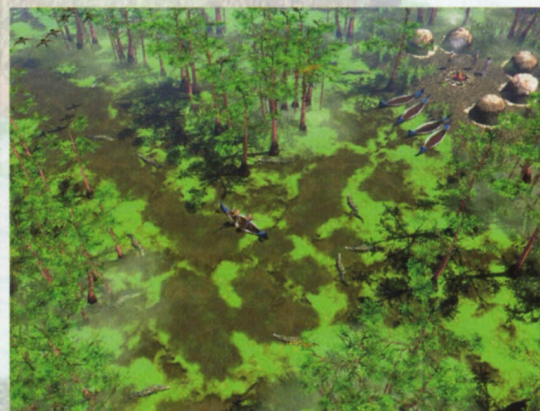
Most restaurants in Dallas would get through this lot in an evening.



The appropriately named Death Valley gets ready for a bit of aggro.



It wouldn't be AOE without hacking up deer for food.



A bit of alligator goes down well with a spicy sauce.

ripples (well done that man). Plus, suffice to say, while you don't really need to, you can of course rotate the camera to provide the best view of the action.

YOUR HISTORY

Enough of the technicalities, what's it all about? *The Age Of Empires* series is renowned for basing the action in vaguely authentic historical settings, and the third outing continues the theme, with something of a twist.

Following directly on from *Age Of Empires II: The Age Of Kings*, the time span is approximately between 1500-1850, and the scenario is the European colonisation of the Americas. Playing as one of eight civilisations, this effectively involves

leaving the sanctity of Europe behind, crossing the ocean to an undiscovered continent and setting up shop there. Covering a huge expanse of land, this has given the art team scope to go to town with the landscapes, covering such diverse terrains as plains full of bison, rainforests, the blue water of the Caribbean, the Colombia river on the North West coast, Patagonia in the South and even the scorched earth of Texas, give or take the odd steak place.

As history recounts, Europeans didn't discover America – it was already there, and inhabited by Native Americans who got something of a raw deal, what with the burning, raping and genocide. Perhaps wisely, Ensemble has decided not to reproduce these details, although the Native Americans haven't been airbrushed from history.

Indeed, some 12 authentic Native American civilisations appear in the game, and instead of butchering them, you can make alliances and use them to your advantage as they impart their knowledge of the New World. For instance, if you get pally with the Aztecs, they teach you how to make cotton armour, and even join in to kick the shit out of the Germans (or whoever). Having local civilisations also gives you reason to explore the map, as opposed to holing yourself

up round your town centre and building up your army.

RESTLESS NATIVES

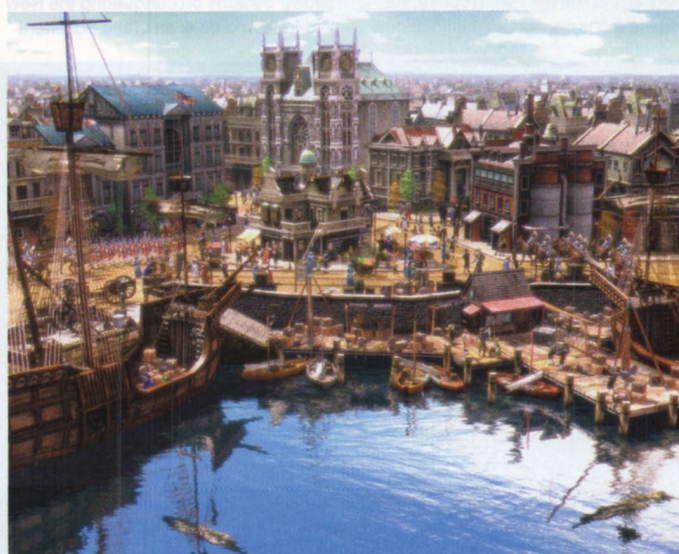
According to lead designer Greg Street: "The Native Americans are strictly a strategy, not an opponent. This isn't a game about going to the New World and burning all the Native American towns. We realise that really happened and we're not denying it, but we just don't think it makes for a very fun experience to have a game that's based around

SAFE EUROPEAN HOME

BRING GLORY TO YOUR CAPITAL CITY

In something of a departure for the genre, every civilisation in *AOE3* will feature what Ensemble is calling a 'Home City' that exists away from the main game and can't be attacked. Typically the capital (although it can be renamed), this represents your home back in Europe, and in many ways can be perceived as analogous to a persistent RPG character. Success in the New World will be reflected back home, and your city can effectively level up with good old-fashioned experience points which you can gain in numerous ways, from winning a battle to killing a bear.

The benefits are tangible and you'll be able to send troops, settlers, wood, food, sheep and so on to the New World from the Home City without any drain on resources. Shipments become available intermittently and take about 20 seconds to arrive. Choosing what to send will have a large bearing on your strategy, giving you the opportunity to play aggressively for instance, by sending loads of troops early on, or to adopt a reactive tactic, by sending whatever resources you're lacking. As the city improves, bonuses are unlocked such as new units. Each geographically-themed city will also exist 'physically' as a single-screened entity that changes over time. Teeming with people, the buildings can also be upgraded and you can even show off your creation to your online friends.



Why go to America when you've got all this?





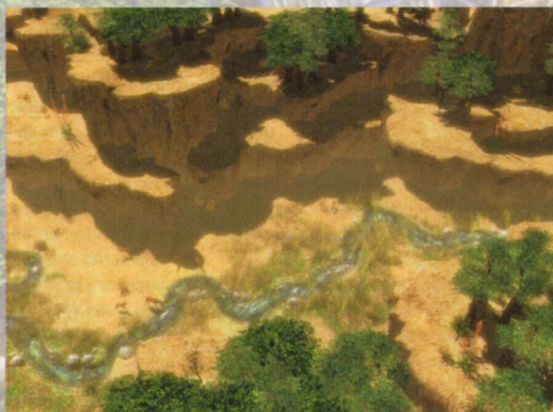
Like *Little House On The Prairie*, but with wanton bloodshed.



Make friends with the natives and they show you the ropes.



Paint yer wagons. So long as they're white.



A beautiful scene, soon to be ravaged by the white devils.



Load 'em up, ship 'em out.

with combat reduced to what it officially refers to as a "swirling mass of crap", whereby everyone simply steams into each other like a cartoon playground scrap, making a mockery of painstakingly building up a comprehensive army.

Doyens of the genre will be more than familiar with this concept, and may be pleased to learn that Ensemble is seeking to rectify the situation with *AOE3*. In fairness, other RTS games have promised this, but Ensemble is researching the area heavily and was happy to show off early prototypes of group-based combat.

conquering indigenous people. We think the Native Americans are cool and when we did focus groups early on with people in the US and in Europe, the fans were really excited about the Native Americans. They wanted to see them on the battlefield, they wanted to get to have Comanche horse archers or Aztecs as part of their army, so we wanted to make sure that Native Americans were a big part of the game. From a design standpoint, one way to think of the Native Americans is like plug-ins to your main tech tree."

We're not sure how Native Americans feel about being plug-ins to a tech tree, but experts in the field were consulted to ensure the authenticity of the various

"We try to work in historical detail where we can, but whenever history and gameplay collide, gameplay wins"

GREG STREET LEAD DESIGNER, *AGE OF EMPIRES III*

tribes. Furthermore, the relevant voices were recorded by genuine Native Americans, who were then taken outside and shot in the head (not really).

INDIAN GIVER

So if you're not killing Indians, who are you killing? Other Europeans, obviously, (including the Germans), who have similar designs on conquering the New World. You'd think an entire continent

would provide enough to go round, but this wouldn't make for much of a game, and keeping the Germans (or whoever) off your patch is one of the key tenets of the *Age Of Empires III* experience.

Combat in RTS games has always been something of a contentious issue, often making a mockery of the strategy that it claims to represent. Ensemble is big enough to admit that its previous games have often been guilty of this,

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Although far from finalised, Ensemble is currently playing with ideas whereby cavalry automatically arrange themselves into chevron formation, or infantry adopt a cover mode that makes them more resistant to artillery barrage. Furthermore, we were witness to a front row of musketeers kneeling down while the back row fired over their heads (not the other way round, that wouldn't work).

Ensemble's stated aim is that it wants to do for battle what *Age Of Kings* did for movement and formation. Whereas that game featured arguably more glamorous units, the focus in *Age Of Empires III* is on huge armies of professional soldiers



Lighting, shadows, the lot. It officially looks dead smart.



Shipments from the Home City arrive at their destination. Better than Royal Mail.



who attempt to retain some kind of formation. The idea is to make the combat more movie-like, with cavalry charges and musketeers loading and firing in the heat of battle. Each unit features a host of animations, with cavalry horses rearing up on their hind legs, for instance. Troops will also react accordingly depending on the method of attack – being shot in the head with a musket is a markedly different to being hacked at with a tomahawk.

MOVING ON UP

What's more, the animations will alter depending on the situation: so at range, a musketeer will loose off a few shots, whereas closer in he'll stick the offending German (or whoever) with his bayonet, or even club him around the back of the neck with the stock. Ensemble is chuffed with the animation of the melee units, with a brace of swordsmen stabbing, slashing and blocking as if in a real duel.

Although much of the combat can be automated, more hardcore tactical micro-management options for bedroom commanders will be included too, such as ordering your boys to fix bayonets and charge the artillery or defend cannons at all costs. Whereas the combat ideas looked feasible in the demo, the version we played still featured an amount of swirling crap. But with six months of development time left, we can only hope Ensemble gets it right for release.

Age Of Empires III is clearly a massive undertaking, as you'd expect



Tall ships give you all manner of water-based options.

from a game that seeks to span 350 years of civilisation. Kicking off at the end of the medieval era, the five ages will incorporate such milestones as the first European breaching of Americas, the French-Indian war and the inception of the industrial revolution, including the railroads, with trains able to transport your troops across the map.

As ever, Ensemble will "play fast and loose with history". This doesn't mean it will deliberately get things wrong, but as Greg Street says: "We use history as our setting. We try to work in historical detail where we can, but whenever history and gameplay collide, gameplay wins."

Besides, so much of so-called history is little more than idle speculation, and

as far as we're concerned, if it hasn't been on TV (preferably in colour) then it probably never happened. As such, we're prepared to take Ensemble's version at face value, and won't be writing in to complain, unlike the Portuguese fan who's been barracking the company for years over the apparent misspelling of a unit type.

So we've covered the graphics, the physics, the setting, the combat... Orchestral score, anyone? Check. A detailed soundscape incorporating recordings of firearms and artillery from Gettysburg re-enactments? Correct.

A tri-generational arcing story in campaign mode interspersed with epic cinematics? Yep. We've even seen a bit of it, involving someone going on the trail of the Frenchman Beaumont, and something about the fountain of youth and lost Spanish gold in Florida. Not a clue.

It doesn't matter. We've played it (honourably losing to a dishonest German), we liked it, we think you might too. As Potty Mouth Pottinger says: "It's Age Of f***** Empires III – buy it!" **PCZ**

WHO ARE YA?

SELECT FROM EIGHT EUROPEAN CIVILISATIONS

Featuring a mix of nations that either extensively colonised the New World, tried and failed or didn't bother, each civilisation has its own strengths and weaknesses, as well as some unique properties. They all have individual Home Cities, both in terms of visuals and tech tree, different economies, as well as at least two unique units. Take your pick from this lot...



British: can get settlers quickly.

Spanish: receive Home City shipments more often.

French: have a sturdy villager, the Coureur.

Portuguese: start the game with the ability to build a second Town Centre.

Dutch: can build banks to generate free coin.

German: spawn Settler Wagons and Uhlán cavalry.

Russian: train all infantry and villagers in groups.

Ottoman: all settlers are spawned for free.



"Make that the last tin of beans, then let's go and crack some skulls."

2005
3
PART ONE



This ain't going to be pretty.



The Waltons were never the same again.

Undeath of a salesman...

STUBBS THE ZOMBIE IN REBEL WITHOUT A PULSE

He's sunken-eyed, pale-skinned and reeks of the grave. But enough about *Sam Kieldsen*...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Wideload Games
PUBLISHER Aspyr Media
WEBSITE www.stubbsthezombie.com
ETA Summer

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Lets you create and control zombie allies
- Alternative 1950s setting
- Uses the *Halo* engine
- Music from The Flaming Lips, Cake and The Dandy Warhols
- You get to be a zombie!

CV

WIDELoad

WIDELoad GAMES

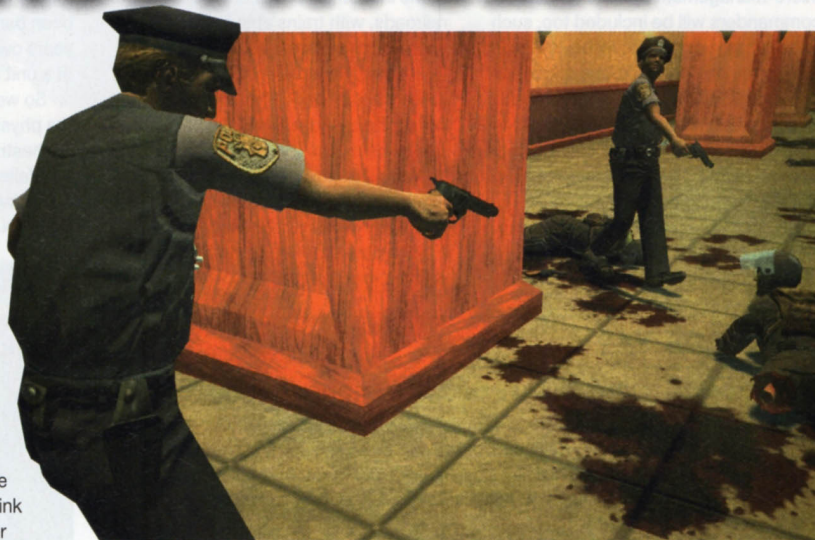
Formed in 2003 by industry vet and Bungie Software founder Alex Seropian, this Chicago-based studio features many of the artists, programmers and designers that helped create the original *Halo*. *Stubbs The Zombie* is Wideload's first game.

ZOMBIES.

Ghouls. The restless dead. If you're a gamer, you've probably dispatched hundreds of the shambling critters in your time. You probably enjoyed it too, didn't you? But maybe you haven't been looking at the bigger picture...

Because zombies are people too. Or at least they were at one point, anyway. They have wants and needs (mostly to do with devouring the still-warm innards of the living, true, but that's beside the point). Did you ever stop to think about that before you clicked your mouse button and decorated a nearby wall with their pus-ridden guts? However, *Stubbs The Zombie* might just change all that, because – as the name cunningly suggests – it puts you in the decomposing skin of Edward 'Stubbs' Stubblefield, a newly risen member of the undead.

Stubbs was a travelling salesman in life, struggling through the hard times of



"It's only a flesh wound – get up and fight man!"

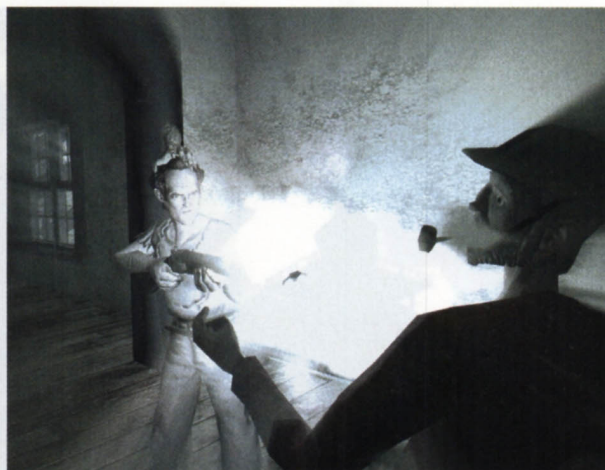
America's Great Depression. His amazing streak of bad luck only came to an end when he was brutally murdered and dumped in a Pennsylvania field.

Fast-forward 26 years. It's 1959, and a super-rich playboy has decided to build an ultra-modern city called Punchbowl on

top of Stubbs' resting place, waking him from his eternal slumber in the process. The zombie doesn't know much – who killed him or why he's back – but he has an unbelievable hankering for human brains and the sort of power he never possessed in his previous existence.



Zombies and shotguns: a classic combination.



The graphics sport an evocative grainy quality.



As any zombie movie aficionado knows, the undead work better in numbers.

So the game casts you as the fag-smoking, hat-wearing ghoul, rampaging through various parts of Punchbowl – a fusion of small-town Americana and *Flash Gordon* – in a gore-drenched third-person action style. Developer Wideload Games' past experience with *Halo* (many of the team helped make it) has led it to use the game's engine, and so *Stubbs* is shaping up very nicely indeed on the visual front.

ZOMBIFIED AND ANCIENT

Stubbs himself has access to a remarkable range of talents. Like any self-respecting ghoul, he loves to feast on brains. Should Stubbs kill a human this way, he or she is resurrected as a zombie ally who attacks adversaries on sight. While you can't control these directly, you will be able to influence them by either whistling (to attract them to you) or

shoving them in whatever direction you want them to go. These septic sidekicks aren't much cop on their own (except as decoys), but like most zombies, they can be deadly in large numbers.

If he's in a tight spot, Stubbs can also call upon his supernatural zombie strength, which allows him to pummel victims to death, sometimes using their own torn-off limbs as improvised cudgels.

LENDING A HAND

Our rotting chum also has the ability to hurl his rancid guts at enemies, or loose a burst of unholy flatulence upon them. Finally, he can send his arm toddling off in search of living prey; find a victim, affix the hand to its bonce and hey presto, you can then call on any of his or her abilities (reminiscent of Shiny Entertainment's cherub 'em up *Messiah*). If you possess an armed

redneck, for instance, you can start popping shots off at other humans.

Wideload's Alex Seropian claims that all these powers – and the inclusion of driveable vehicles – will work towards making *Stubbs The Zombie* a rewardingly non-linear experience in places. "Say there's a posse of cops in pursuit of Stubbs. He can bum-rush them and try to beat them purely through brute strength in melee combat. Either that, or he could hide somewhere and send his hand to possess one of the cops and then use him to shoot the rest. Or he could zombieify several less dangerous enemies – a gang of teenage hoodlums, for example – and lead them to where the cops are."

The whole thing is beginning to look extremely promising, not least because of the jet-black humour and the chance to experience the world – albeit a weirdly

Q&A

ALEX SEROPIAN



PART ONE

The ex-Bungie man waxes lyrical about the joys of brain-eating...

PCZ Who is Stubbs and how did he manage to become such a mischievous member of the undead?

ALEX Even in life, Stubbs was remarkably persistent. You needed tenacity to survive as a travelling salesman during the Great Depression. But you needed other things as well – charm, guile, luck and the ability to dodge the shotgun blasts of angry customers. Unfortunately, Stubbs was missing at least one of those qualities. So, he died and spent a couple of decades in a shallow grave in the middle of a barren Pennsylvania field. That would've been the end of it if billionaire playboy Andrew Monday hadn't chosen that very site as the location of Punchbowl, his futuristic model city. Urban planners often fail to take the undead into consideration, and Punchbowl is no different in that regard.

PCZ It's been said that there's a love story somewhere in *Stubbs The Zombie*. Who's the object of his affections?

ALEX She'll remain nameless for the time being, but I can confirm she's one of the leading lights of Punchbowl society.

PCZ What does Stubbs have against the people he preys upon?

ALEX Stubbs was never at home in polite society and that problem has only become worse now that he's a zombie. The injustice of it all is apparent if you just look at it from his point of view. They're alive; he's a murder victim with a shotgun wound in his gut. Many of them are violent anti-zombie bigots, perfectly willing to blast more holes in him without even getting to know him first. They've got all those delicious brains (most of which they aren't even using), and they refuse to share. Everything about them just rubs him the wrong way.

PCZ What's Stubbs' favourite food?

ALEX Stubbs prefers the hearty meals found in America's heartland. Though I hear he's got a soft spot for German brains... Er, I mean cuisine.

skewed sci-fi version of the 1950s – from a zombie's point of view. Fans of indie music may also be intrigued by the lineup of strangely-coiffed bands enlisted to provide audio accompaniment. It includes The Flaming Lips, Cake, The Dandy Warhols and Phantom Planet, who've supplied an original track appropriately entitled *The Living Dead*.

Yep, *Stubbs The Zombie* is rapidly becoming a ZONE favourite and we can't wait for *Rebel Without A Pulse*. Gory *Flash Gordon*-influenced undead action from a team that helped bring us *Halo*? Where do we sign up? [X]

2005
E3
PART ONE



Cruise liner security – always a priority.

You bet your life...

BET ON SOLDIER

Sam Kiildsen stamps out a cigarette butt and stares with dead eyes at a monitor in Ladbrokes, silently contemplating his losses...

'A GRIM DYSTOPIAN

future' comes in at number 14 in the Bumper Book Of Great Games Clichés. *Unreal Tournament*, *Half-Life 2*, *Deus Ex* – George Orwell seems to have created a monster that will not die, and French developer Kylotonn's *Bet On Soldier* is next on the list.

It's set during a brutal world war where the battling parties aren't nations but (wait for it) rival corporations, the true rulers of the planet. This war's McSoldiers aren't hitting the battlefield for reasons of patriotism or morality, but because killing is the best way of making gargantuan piles of moolah. The crème de la crème of mercs (a group which includes you) are

invited to participate in *Running Man*-style game shows, where they get the chance to earn big bucks and stardom.

The issue of money is central to *Bet On Soldier*: there are no weapons or health pick-ups to grab, so you find yourself tooling up with weapons before a level and having cash drained from you by ammo and armour terminals scattered throughout each stage. Not only that, but you can splash the cash on mercenary sidekicks to back you up in battle. These include specialists such as engineers – able to repair

your armour for free – as well as tougher combat troops.

FILTHY LUCRE

Luckily, making money is a pretty straightforward process, as it merely involves dealing death to lots of enemies. Pull off a particularly skilful kill (a headshot for instance) and you're rewarded with a tasty bonus. If you want to rake in the riches even more quickly, you can place bets against the other champions that crop up during the levels. There will be over 40 of these boss-like characters in



A mech, yesterday.



Mercs give you a helping hand.

the final game, each one with strengths and weaknesses that you (and a television audience of millions) will be keenly on the lookout for. Not only will you have to kill these opposing badasses to win your bet, but you also have to do it within 60 seconds of them popping up.

Weapons run the FPS gamut, from pistol all the way to sniper rifle and rocket launcher, so no prizes for innovation there, although *Pariah*-style weapon upgrades are promised to deliver the personal touch. One particularly meaty rocket launcher lets you 'tag' a target so that all subsequent shots home in on it automatically. The target rarely knows what hit him. Although, given a little time, he'd probably get the gist of it. Big stompy robots meanwhile, much akin to 'Get away from her you Bitch!' Power-Loaders in *Aliens* are also available for disabling and consequent control for you and your hired buddies.

The betting concept doesn't stop at single-player either and, even though Kylotonn's remarkably lofty multi-player ambitions seem to have dampened somewhat since the last time we met them, *Bet On Soldier* will have eight classes to choose from, and each of the six 32-player maps will contain an arena where one-on-one fights will take place. You'll then be able to lay bets on your team's representative, and call him names when he dies like a dog in the street.

The code we saw still needs some spit and polish, but it certainly has the makings of a cult favourite – but will it topple the big boys revealed at this year's E3? Each-way bets 1/5 odds first, going is good. [X]



"Bet you can't knock his hat off." "Bet I can."

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Kylotonn

PUBLISHER Digital Jesters

ETA August

WEBSITE www.betonsoldier.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Novel betting system
- Meaty, shiny and metallic visuals
- Upgradeable weapons
- Big stompy robots
- In-game branch of William Hill

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THE CONSPIRACY IS NO LONGER A THEORY



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CV

RAVEN
SOFTWARE

RAVEN SOFTWARE

Raven's relationship with id predates the original *Doom*. id provides the engine, Raven makes the games...

- 1994** *CyClones* was a highly underrated pioneer of the FPS genre.
- 1995** *Hexen* was effectively *Doom* with magic wands.
- 1996** *Heretic* saw more spellcasting shenanigans.
- 1997** *Hexen II* added a role-playing slant to the concept.
- 1998** *Heretic II* was more magical nonsense.
- 2000** *Soldier Of Fortune* proved a big favourite amongst the Guns & Ammo crowd.
- 2000** *Star Trek: Voyager - Elite Force* gave Trekkies a big hard-on.
- 2002** *Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix* took body dismemberment to new levels.
- 2002** *Star Wars: Jedi Knight II - Jedi Outcast* received approval from those who care.
- 2003** *Star Wars: Jedi Knight - Jedi Academy* provided another well-crafted buzz for the lightsaber set.

Off the Richter scale...

QUAKE IV

Steve Hill with the latest on
the game that will shake
your world

TIME WAS, you knew where you were with your *Dooms* and your *Quakes* - id Software's *Doom* and *Doom II* provided a mindless blast through the catacombs of hell, whereas the opening brace of *Quakes* were more sophisticated fare, featuring something resembling a story. The multiplayer focused *Quake III: Arena* turned everything on its head, whereas *Doom 3* provided a tense trawl through the zombie-ridden corridors of a Mars outpost. Which brings us to *Quake IV*, a narrative-based affair that follows on from the story of *Quake II* and is based on the *Doom 3* engine. And developed by Raven, not id, which takes the role of executive producer. Confused? You will be, although hopefully less so once you've read our report on the world's first public viewing of the game in LA.

First things first: that story. If you don't remember the ending of *Quake II*, the Earth Defence Force took the battle

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Raven/id Software
PUBLISHER Activision
ETA TBC
WEBSITE quake4.ravengames.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Introduction of new character
- Squad-based gameplay
- Shock storyline
- *Quake III*-style multiplayer...



Engines come and go, but the crates remain the same.

back to planet Stroggos and knocked out their sophisticated air defence. This enabled them to land, whereupon they took out the Strogg leader, Makron, in the hope that the Strogg hierarchy would crumble. Conveniently, this didn't quite work out, and *Quake IV* finds you as a different character, hovering above Stroggos as a member of Rhino squad, a small part of a massive invasion force. Unfortunately, your drop-ship is hit and crash-lands. In the confusion of the ensuing battle, your squad leaves you for dead. Clearly, you're not, and having regained consciousness, your first task is to reconnect with your squad, and presumably thank them.

KANE AND ABLE

It's not exactly *Citizen Kane*, but it is Matthew Kane, the name of the marine that you play. Something of a dark hero with a mysterious past, Kane is a square-jawed brick shithouse with a buzzcut hairdo and a steely glare who commands respect from all whom he meets. As one fresh-faced recruit exclaimed in the action we saw, "I thought Matthew Kane was just a story they made up to scare recruits..."

The appearance of Kane marks the first time in the *Quake* series that the lead character has been given an identity, not a decision that id took lightly. Tim Willits is the creative liaison between id and Raven, and he explained the thinking behind the move.

"Because one of our objectives for this title was to make more of an engaging story, we wanted to have your squad have an identity and have guys

you recognise, and you kinda learn their personalities and things. They have to talk about you, and it really made no sense for them to say, 'Hey, nameless marine guy over there,' so we felt that it made more sense for him to have a name and an identity."

Quake IV is also representative of the trend towards more narrative-based games. Willits claims, "Gaming now has surpassed television and movies for people's time and gamers have matured, games have matured, and people expect the full range of entertainment in a single game. You can't have random action without context, without some meaning behind it. People just expect more now, they want the full experience, so in order to deliver that you need story, you need different gameplay experiences."

From what we've seen, those 'different gameplay

experiences' should make *Quake IV* the most varied title in the *Quake* – or indeed *Doom* – universe. Whereas *Doom 3* was a largely solitary experience, *Quake IV* will at various times have you fighting as part of a squad, embarking on solo missions and piloting a range of vehicles. We managed to establish that a hover-tank

SPOILER ALERT!

HAVE YOU GOT THE LEGS FOR IT?

About halfway through the game, you are captured by the Strogg and taken to the Stroggification plant, a nightmarish compound wherein the Strogg integrate other races, turning them into cybernetic warriors. You are eventually rescued before your neural transmitter is switched on, and are able to run faster, jump higher and use Strogg weapons, thus becoming a lynchpin in the conflict.

Beforehand though, in what must rank as one of the most macabre cut-scenes ever made, you are strapped to a conveyor belt to undergo the Stroggification process, providing a terrifying view of the screaming bloke ahead of you, thus letting you know what's coming. All carried out without general anaesthetic, the various operations are truly sickening, culminating in a sequence whereby your legs are severed above the knee, leaving you looking down at your bloodied stumps – something that almost made us lose our (insubstantial) breakfast. Well, this is from Raven, creator of ultra-violent shooter franchise *Soldier Of Fortune*...

is involved at some stage, and were also privy to a viewing of the Walker, a great big brutal affair that crushes foot soldiers like bugs. Currently, all vehicles are driven from a first-person perspective, and id insists that it will not be mimicking the *Halo*-style third-person control system.

Visually, the "heavily modified" *Doom 3* engine looks to the untrained eye very much like *Doom 3*, although with outdoor areas and busier action it should prove more interesting. And in a nod to the risible situation in *Doom 3* (that resulted in the unofficial gaffer tape

patch) you should now be able to hold a gun and a torch at the same time. A number of classic weapons will return, and all will be modifiable, enabling you to steer a rocket launcher or bounce a railgun, for instance. Naturally, id is also promising a "kick-ass multiplayer component," with 16 players, grenade jumps and all that, plus some classic maps with very much a *Quake III* feel.

Id is convinced that it will be the best *Quake* game ever, and from what we saw we have no reason to disbelieve them. The breakfast was a bit shit though. Cake? ☹️



Guess who was last in line at the cybernetic leg factory?



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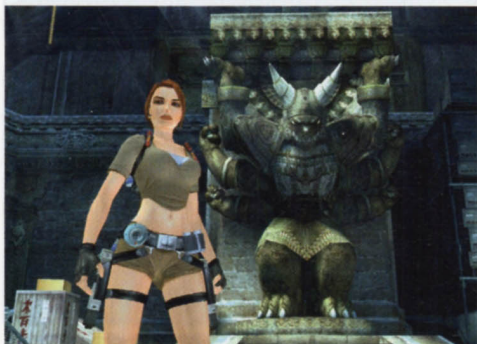
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What's the betting that comes to life?



Lara considered herself totally prepared for anything this year's Glastonbury festival could throw at her.

A Lara Lara expectations... TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Sam Kildsen heaves on his microscopic hotpants and waddles bravely into the darkness beneath the world

IT'S FAIR to say that Lara Croft and the *Tomb Raider* franchise have taken one hell of a battering in recent years. After her hugely successful first outing, the square-breasted aristocrat must have felt high-on invincible. Sadly, years of subsequent abuse at the hands of uninspired games developers, not to mention a couple of dodgy movies, have worn down the lady's veneer of perfection, and the series has degenerated into something of a sad joke in gaming circles.

But all that is set to change. At least, it is if you believe what publisher Eidos is saying. Yes, yes, we know this is the same company who promised the horrifically bug-ridden *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* would reinvigorate the third-person sepulchre-looting genre, but this time it's got an ace up its sleeve in the

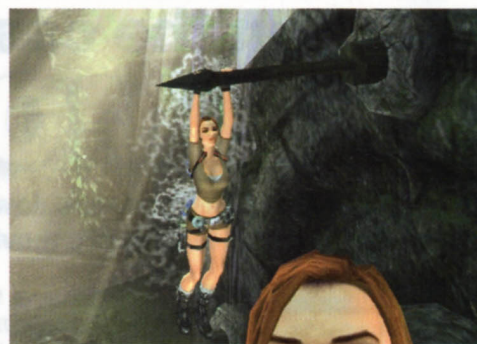
shape of original Lara Croft creator Toby Gard, who's been hired as lead character designer for *Tomb Raider: Legend*.

As these screenshots show, Gard has applied a touch of what film directors often describe as a 're-imagining' to Lara. She's unmistakably the same feisty posh bird we all enjoyed accompanying on her mausoleum-robbing sprees all those years ago, but she now carries frag grenades and sports a pair of non-ridiculously-sized norks (although her shorts appear to have shrunk in the wash). It's a new Lara for a new generation, or something. As well as the new character model, she's also getting freshly-animated moves, expressions and abilities, and neat little features like reactive eyes.

CHANGING TOMBS

You'll also get plenty of gadgets to help make your catacomb-based thievery go smoother than ever. Aside from the famous dual pistols, Lara's now packing communications gear, binoculars, a magnetic grappling thingummy and something that Crystal Dynamics refers to as a 'personal lighting device' – what's wrong with 'torch'?

The developer is also making noises that suggest a return to Lara's old-style



"Er, I'm a bit stuck."



It's like taking a trip down memory lane.

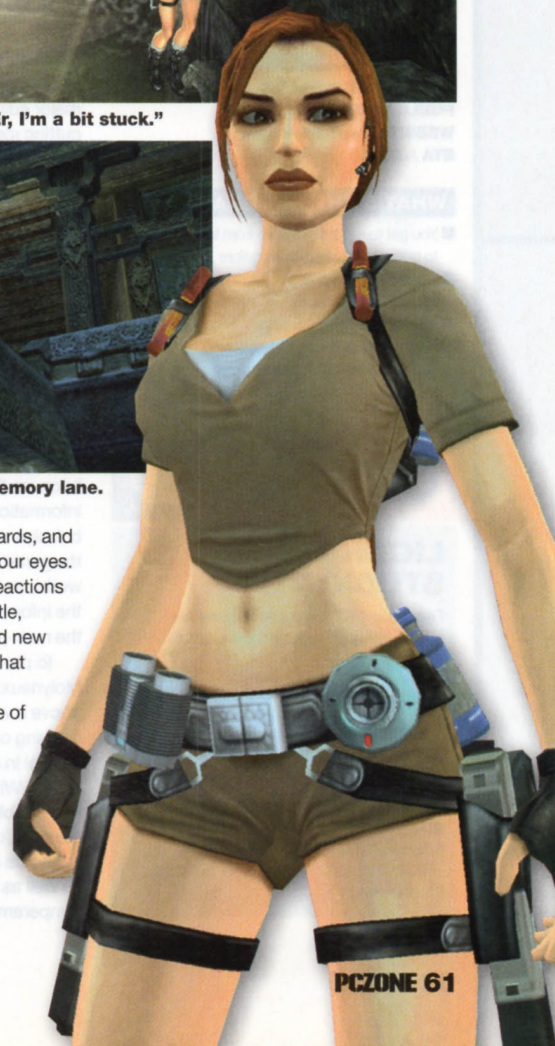
crypt-burgling antics is on the cards, and this can only be a good thing in our eyes. The team has poured over the reactions to each previous *Tomb Raider* title, replayed them all and conducted new research in an effort to unearth that elusive fun factor. In our humble opinion, a well-balanced mixture of exploration and puzzle-solving was the cornerstone of the first game's appeal, and if Crystal Dynamics can successfully recapture that, then we could finally see a new *Tomb Raider* game that lives up to the Lara legend. Full playtest soon. **PCZ**

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Eidos
PUBLISHER Crystal Dynamics
WEBSITE www.tombraider.com
ETA Q3 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's got a spanking new Lara...
- ...But it's returning to its roots
- Tons of toys to play with



2005
PART ONE



The sponsored platform jogs were a roaring success.



Hooray for Hollywood!



There are thousands of scene types to choose from.

Bring on the casting couch... THE MOVIES

Jamie 'Spielberg' Sefton looks down the lens at the latest rushes from Lionhead's movie-making sim...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Lionhead Studios

PUBLISHER Activision

WEBSITE www.lionhead.com

ETA Autumn

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- You get to run a film studio from top to bottom making movies galore
- Innovative control and information interfaces
- Manage lifelike movie stars
- Features cutting-edge lip-synching and character-ageing technology

CV

LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Formed in 1997, Lionhead Studios has already enjoyed huge success on both the PC and Xbox...

2001 *Black & White* hits the shelves and shifts millions of copies worldwide.

2002 *Black & White: Creature Isles* proves a highly competent and entertaining expansion pack for the popular god game.

2004 Xbox RPG *Fable* becomes one of the fastest-selling Xbox games ever. A PC version – *Fable: The Lost Chapters* – is due for release later this year.

SINCE WE last previewed it five issues ago, *The Movies* has undergone a major edit, with old code now littering the cutting room floor at Lionhead Studios. So when we were invited to see this potential blockbuster first-hand, it was impossible to refuse.

The first thing that strikes you is the game's almost complete lack of on-screen icons. "We've taken them away and replaced them with little bubbles that appear when you hover your mouse over something," explains Lionhead's founder and head Peter Molyneux.

"We call them intelligent Tool Tips. In most games, you end up playing the whole game in the menu because that's where all of the information is. These Tool Tip bubbles mean you can play the game in the real gaming world, as they give you all of the information you need in the main part of the screen."

To prove his point, Molyneux hovers his mouse above a wannabe actor queuing outside a Stage School in a pre-built movie studio. Within a second, two bubbles sprout from the man, describing his strengths and weaknesses, as well as details about his temperament and appearance.

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Benny Hill in the year 2196.

"We want to make sure that anyone can pick up and play this game as quickly as possible, so we've added guiding streams that show you the most sensible thing to do with each character," Molyneux explains as he picks up the wannabe actor with a single mouse click, a subtle guiding stream meandering its way from the hovering man to the Stage School. "These streams show you the best thing to do with each person. But you won't have to do what they tell you, as you can also do mad and crazy things with any character."

ONE CLICK

In this instance though, Molyneux follows the guiding stream into the Stage School, which features three separate rooms for creating star actors, extras and directors. With another single mouse click, he drops the character onto

the Create Star room, and hey presto, a new star is born – with no casting couch involved.

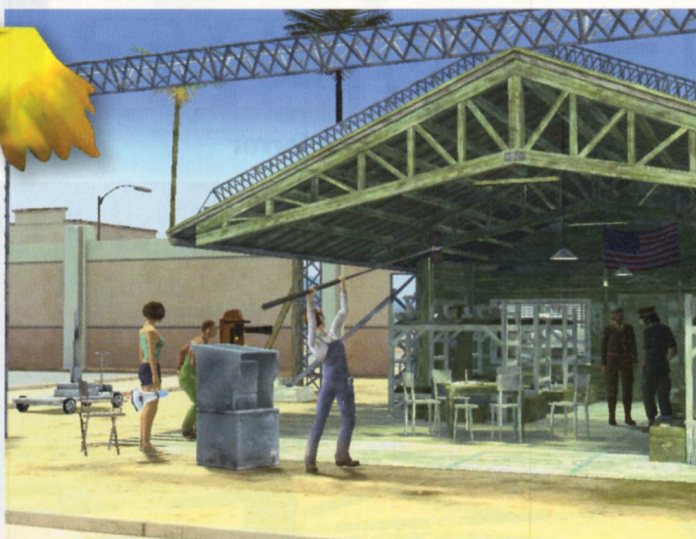
WHAT'S MY MOTIVATION?

Of course, once you've created your stars you have to maintain them – something that's easier said than done. With each and every character in *The Movies* carrying unique personalities and attributes, juggling the needs and wants of your star actors and directors is a near full-time job in itself.

"Some stars will be very difficult to manage and you'll need to give them loads of pampering. As soon as they get pissed off, they start developing addictions or refusing to work," explains lead designer Mark Webley. "Some stars will demand to be kept looking young and beautiful by having cosmetic surgery, or maybe you'll need to reinvent them," adds head of studio, Gary Carr.

Ultimately, your stars will be the main focus of the game and by helping them maintain good moods, you soon find yourself reaping the benefits at the box

SOUNDING OFF

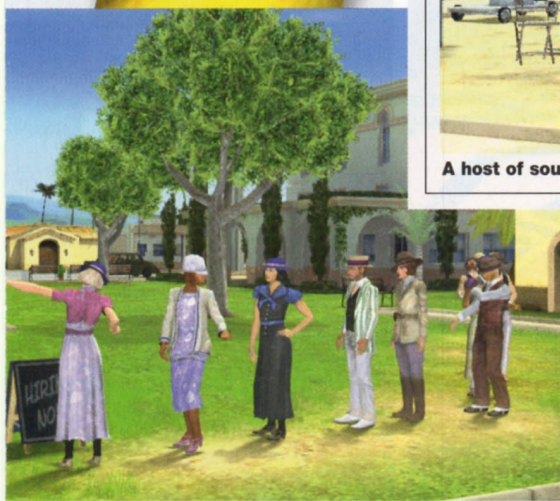


A host of sounds and music tracks should give your films added weight.

THE FILMS ARE ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF MUSIC...

Facial expressions and versatile scenes are all very well, but they'd count for nothing if *The Movies* didn't feature some great sound options too. You can breathe easy though – there's certainly enough to satisfy even the most demanding of audio engineers in the ear dept.

First off, there are over 80 unique soundtracks, ranging from plinky-plonky early 1900's rag-time to full-on orchestral pieces recorded with the Prague Philharmonic orchestra. What's more, there's also a database of literally thousands of unique sound effects to spice up your movies. As if this wasn't enough, you can record your own dialogue for each scene too, which will be perfectly lip-synched for each character. Sylvester Stallone had better watch out...



As David Essex once said, we're gonna make you a star.



Go on love, take it off. The necklace that is.



"Vere is ze Madonna viz ze big boobies?"

office – a happy actor gives a far better performance than a miserable one.

Just like in real life, the press plays a major role in giving your stars and movies exposure too, be it positive or negative. To demonstrate, Molyneux zooms into his studio lot, where a paparazzo is stalking his new star waiting for a photo opportunity.

"The more successful your studio, the more paparazzi will hang around your movie lot," explains Carr as we watch the trailing photographer take a snap of its prey. "The thing is, you can manipulate your stars to be in certain situations to get them or your movies more exposure. You can pick up the paparazzi if you want and drop them where you want them, say near a restaurant where your leading stars are having a drink together. The game's as much about manipulating situations as it is about making movies."

Next, we're taken on a tour of the Advanced Movie-Making screen, the place where your celluloid masterpieces will be forged. "When you want to make your own movies, we teach you some of the secrets that the movie industry uses," Carr continues. "One of these secrets is called 'The Hero's Journey', a template that most Hollywood movies use."

GORGEOUS DAHLINK

Just like *The Hero's Journey*, your movie will be broken down into several segments that chart the key events that happen to your main character. However, how and what you film for each segment is completely up to you. With a collection of literally thousands of scenes – each replete with a slider that enables you to change both the outcome and camera set-up for each and every one – the

movie-making options available to you are immense. Add to this the ability to add your own perfectly lip-synched voiceovers to characters, who can depict genuine facial emotions, and you're left with what's looking like being a hugely powerful, versatile and what's more, superbly entertaining movie-making tool.

Without doubt, *The Movies* is shaping up beautifully, a game that could be as intuitive and accessible as it is powerful and compelling. With just a few months left before its release, you'll soon be able to see for yourself whether or not it can deliver on its clearly titanic promise, and enable us all to make everything from schlock action thriller to cheesy sci-fi on our PC. Roll on *Casablanca II: The Revenge*. [PW]



Who dares wins...

THE REGIMENT

Steve Hill unveils the latest weapon in the war against terror



Nice floor. That bloodstain will take some shifting though.

ONE OF THE defining television moments of the 20th century, the 1980 Iranian Embassy hostage siege was beamed live to an incredulous three-channel nation that was yet to be fragmented by such fanciful notions as 24-hour Sky News. That the Snooker World Championship was interrupted by the coverage added even more weight to a situation that was literally explosive. With negotiations at a deadlock, the SAS stormed the building, killing five of the six terrorists and rescuing all 20-plus hostages intact. An impressive achievement, it was also a massive slice of publicity for the near-mythical Special Forces unit.

Present that day was handsomely-moustachioed SAS veteran John McAleese, who planted the initial breaching charge that blew out the

window. Now running corporate training days, he's been enlisted by Konami to advise on *The Regiment*, and also appears within the game in a series of frank interviews, revealing such nuggets as the fact that the SAS weren't frightened before storming the Embassy as they were so engrossed in the snooker.

JUST THE PINK NEEDED...

With you at the helm of a four-man counter-terrorist team, the events of that fateful day (at the Iranian Embassy, not the Embassy World Championship) are

recreated, give or take a bit of artistic licence, in *The Regiment*. There's also a clutch of fictional scenarios, including an attack on The Houses Of Parliament. Aiming for authenticity, developer Kuju contacted the Ministry Of Defence, who promptly denied that the SAS exist. Nevertheless, with the input of McAleese, as well as another still-active member, *The Regiment* could arguably claim to be the unofficial game of the SAS.

As such, it has a very British feel, which may come as a welcome relief compared to the US stylings of the



Aha! The famed table trick again.



It's the only language they understand.



The pro-hunting lobby up the ante.

Conflict series and the multinational love-in of *Rainbow Six*. British grime is brought to the fore in a level set in a tube station, where a terrorist outfit has hanged a policeman by the neck until dead and captured a number of terrified hostages. Following a briefing by McAleese, you have to go in and terminate with extreme prejudice.

'ARD AS NAILS

Genuine SAS tactics are employed, such as the feted double tap, whereby you shoot the bad guy twice to ensure that he's not feigning death. There's a comprehensive training mode set in the sinister Killing House where SAS recruits are put through their paces and SAS protocol has to be followed at all times. Depending on your levels of health/cowardice, you can send your team ahead to clear rooms and secure hostages, or lead from the front and take down the infidels yourself.

Using a version of the Unreal engine it looks solid if unspectacular, but with all manner of multiplayer shenanigans, *The Regiment* could prove an interesting addition to the squad-based counter-terrorist genre. As long as it doesn't interrupt the snooker... [X]

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Kuju London
PUBLISHER Konami
WEBSITE www.konami-regiment.com
ETA October 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Recreates the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege
- Effectively the unofficial game of the SAS
- Input from SAS veteran John McAleese
- The UK's answer to *Rainbow Six*



Terrorists barricade themselves in, but a table is no match for the famous SAS.

BOILING POINT

ROAD TO HELL

16+

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www.atari.com/boilingpoint

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DVD
ROM



DEEP SHADOWS



ATARI



It's good to torque...

TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

Suzy Wallace decides that she much prefers her horses to be under a car bonnet...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Codemasters

PUBLISHER Codemasters

WEBSITE www.codemasters.co.uk

ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The sequel to *ZONE*'s favourite driving game of 2004
- New Pro Career and improved World Tour mode
- Now with even more car licenses and tracks
- Improved damage, graphics and driving engines

CV

Codemasters
GENIUS AT PLAY

CODEMASTERS

Both Codemasters and the *TOCA* series are no strangers to the genre. The duo embarked on their illustrious career way back in 1997, and this is certainly not the first time Codemasters has nailed the driving game...

1997 *TOCA Touring Car Championship* meant you could drive cars from the BTCC in one of the first driving games to have a realistic damage model.

1999 Still focusing on touring cars, *TOCA 2 Touring Cars* also managed to squeeze in seven speciality cars.

2003 A new millennium saw *TOCA Race Driver* branching out into other areas of racing with a new character-based storyline involved.

2004 Last year's excellent *TOCA Race Driver 2* saw you tear your way through 15 different types of motorsport.

NESTLED IN the heart of the Warwickshire countryside lies an office of people whose heads are so crammed with car information that the grass outside should have withered a long time ago in sympathy. The office belongs to Codemasters, who brought us the superb *TOCA* series, beginning in 1997 and culminating with the superb *TOCA Race Driver 2* last year.

Its petrol-sniffing mix of different motorsports, accessible handling and a huge variety of cars to play with made *TOCA* our favourite driving game of 2004, storming home in our driving supertest (issue 146) to take pole position. But the car-addicted team hasn't been resting on its podium – rather, it's been hard at work on the

sequel since a few months after the last release, and our recent visit to the company's idyllic headquarters allowed us to get a first look at what's in store for the next in the series.

NEW TO YOU

The first noticeable difference can be found in the game modes. World Tour mode is similar to the previous Career mode, featuring an interactive storyline and the re-appearance of the highly-strung Scottish advisor Scotty. As head of studio Gavin Raeburn tells us: "Nearly every aspect of the game is being either revisited or rewritten to improve *TOCA Race Driver 3*."

To keep the game as enjoyable as possible, the sometimes-limited choice

of races has been expanded too. This means that if you're not so keen on making like a Texan redneck and taking the trucks out for a spin, there should be plenty of viable alternatives to keep you happy. Also new to this version is the Pro Career mode that offers the chance to specialise in one of seven paths of driving, from rallying to GT. For example, should you choose to take an open wheel path, you'll start off in novice go-kart races, progressing through mildly-tuned Formula 100 and Formula 3 to eventually make your way up to join the full-blown BMW Williams Formula 1 team.

The sheer amount of motorsports on offer in *TRD3* makes us feel like a kid in a pick'n'mix shop – this year's version has more than doubled the variety, featuring



Open-wheeled racers will have their own career path.



Bug-eyed Morgan, TVR and Mosler all make us dribble.





a staggering 35 different varieties. New events up for grabs include Formula 1, the British GT championship and Honda lawnmower racing. No, really.

What's more, there are over 45 tracks available to dump rubber on, each with their own variations providing in excess of 100 circuits. In addition, 80 cars will be ready to test-drive, all based on the real-life racing equivalents, thus providing a garage of vehicles that would make any Premiership football club car park blush.

REALITY CHECK

So what else is changing? Well, Codemasters is keen to stress the emphasis on realism this time around, so if that's your cup of tea you'll be able

to turn on warm-up laps, practice sessions and flags. The updated driving model will simulate tyre wear and temperature, engine temperature, down force, fuel consumption and plenty of other baffling statistics. Another new feature is the ability to upgrade parts in certain championships, and these will be based on real-world racing parts (instead of what your average *Max Power* reader has bought from Halfords).

Online play is also promised to be tweaked to keep it as competitive as possible, so as well as the standard overall rating, you'll also be rewarded with a rating for each championship and discipline – no longer will you have to be the jack-of-all-trades to get your name in lights. The highest ranked cars' laps will


be available for download too, enabling you to race against them as ghost cars. Plus, in an effort to avoid playing against any inevitable cheats, detailed host information will be on offer before you enter a race. In addition, a new spectator mode also offers you the chance to sit in on other people's races, or just watch the race progress if you happen to destroy your wheels in a 150mph smash.

CRASH, BANG, WALLOP!

Talking about crashes, the team's also been hard at work on one of our favourite bits of the game – the damage model. As well as cosmetic damage, your style of driving will also affect the mechanical components of the car. So now, driving like a lunatic may get you to

the front of the pack, but you'll also have to keep an eye on your car to stop it from becoming a contender for *Scrapheap Challenge*. "The refined engine means you can really thrash the cars and see the real-world results," continues Raeburn. "Radiators will overheat, tyres will burn out, engines will blow – the works."

The graphical ante is also being upped with 'bloom' lighting effects and all manner of eye-pleasing DX9 effects competing for your visual attention in the overhauled engine.

Yep, things appear to be shaping up very nicely indeed and with another six months still to be spent tinkering under the bonnet, we can't wait to see the finished model. 

"Driving like a lunatic may get you to the front of the pack, but you'll also have to make sure your car doesn't end up on *Scrapheap Challenge*"



HEADS UP

THINGS ARE LOOKING GOOD FOR TOCA RACE DRIVER 3...



Let's face it, when it comes to the characters in *TOCA*, you either loved or hated Scotty. He's scheduled for a re-appearance though, so prepare for more north-of-the-border swearing in the pit lane in *TOCA 3*. In the vein of improving on pretty much everything *TRD2* had to offer, we also had a look at Codemasters' new facial animation system. Using a fancy system known as photogrammetry, eight cameras film the actor's head and the results are then used to animate the 3D head in-game. The system is normally found in use in the film industry and although we only saw an early test, the finished result promises to be very special indeed.

What's more, *TOCA*'s accompanying storyline is told through the use of cut-scenes sprinkled throughout the game. This time around, the emphasis will be less on watching Scotty fume at various pretty ladies and more on supplying you with relevant information about the forthcoming races. This means they'll involve supplying you with details on the cars and style of driving required for the next round.

2005
PART ONE



"Must beat the spring sales stampede..."

Saying goodbye to Hollywood... FAHRENHEIT

Will Porter assesses the best thing to happen to story-telling since Enid Blyton

NOT SO LONG ago, whenever someone called a game an 'interactive movie' you knew three things: that Tim Curry was never far away, that there would probably be an exposed breast or two and that it would without doubt be an unmitigated pile of shite. *Phantasmagoria*, *Frankenstein: Through The Eyes Of The Monster*, *The Daedalus Encounter*... All of them thought they could conjure up the magic of cinema through rubbish FMV, female flesh and two and a half special effects, and unsurprisingly none of them did.

Fahrenheit though, even if its designers probably wouldn't like the tag, is finally going to get it right. It's played from the third person, but it feels like a movie and actually manages to be truly interactive – and really bloody clever with it. One of the characters you control is a man forced to kill strangers against his will, another is the female cop hot on his trail – from this premise the story pans out and branches according to the way you play the game.

Confused? Well, say you've reached the part at which Lucas (the guy who finds

himself stabbing passers-by at inopportune moments and who may or may not, according to your whim, clear up the mess afterwards) meets up with his estranged clergyman brother in a snowy park. Accept his moral advice and he'll play a major role in the coming tale; argue and tell him to keep his nose out of your homicidal business and he'll never appear again.

Minutes later, meanwhile, the powers growing within you foresee the drowning of a small child in the park's lake. Save him and you run the risk of being recognised by a nearby policeman; let him die and you remain incognito, but

you'll be plunged even further into remorse and growing insanity – perhaps culminating in you putting a gun to your temple and ending it all prematurely. It's all up to you, and everything you do or don't do – even to the extent of leaving fingerprints or forgetting to wash your hands – will have a bearing on the plot and the way in which you play the parallel tale of Carla and Tyler – the cops following your trail.

JUMP JUMP SPIN

Bizarrely enough, *Fahrenheit* also mixes in a fair amount of action scenes governed by timely tapping of relevant keys, turning

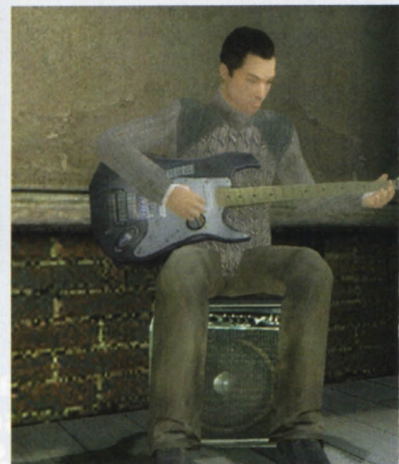
"It feels like a movie and actually manages to be truly interactive"



What's a nice man like you doing in a place like this?



Mediterranean-patterned tiling. Nice.



"Mamma mia, here I go again..."



Need a piss. Virgin snow. Hmmm...

into a bizarre mash-up of *The Bourne Identity*'s fight scenes and *Dance Dance Revolution*. Something similar was employed in *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*, but whereas the most thrilling thing that that had you do there was open a fridge door very quickly, here you're high-kicking, leaping over cars, hanging onto helicopters and jumping off buildings in extremely quick succession. It looks great fun in motion, albeit currently a lot more attuned to an Xbox pad rather than a keyboard and mouse.

Ploughing its own furrow, with more endings than *The Return Of The King* – and with the first (covered) male erection ever seen in a mainstream game ("may have to cut that out for the US release" says the developer) – *Fahrenheit* is worth keeping tabs on. Bit odd though. **EW**

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Quantic Dreams

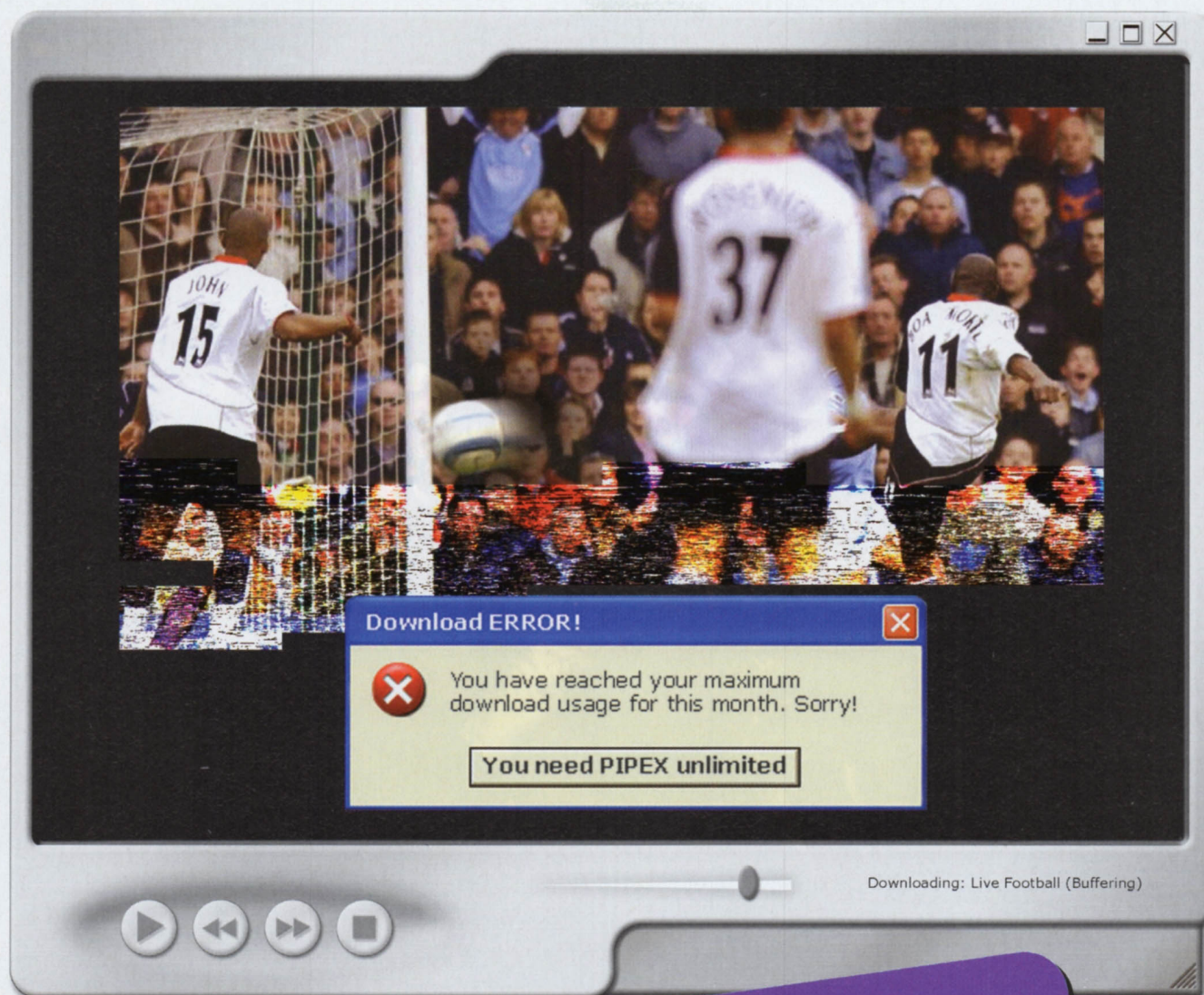
PUBLISHER Atari

WEBSITE www.fahrenheitgame.com

ETA Q4

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Like nothing you've played before
- Story guided by your actions
- Adult, violent, complex
- Crazy *Dance Dance Revolution*-style action



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Even though one's nice and the other's a bad 'un, they're both unstoppable killing machines.

Sibling rivalry...

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3

Will Porter asks: "Why take two *Prince Of Persias* into the shower when you can take one?"

PRINCE OF PERSIA:

Sands Of Time featured a nice prince who made some people extremely happy and want to have his babies. He didn't really make very much money. *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within* featured a nasty prince and women with leather gear who garotted their bottoms, so the people who were previously extremely

happy decided that baby-making was off the menu – although they did settle at least for a warm cuddle. It created a pile of money that would have bank-rolled a moderate military incursion into a Middle Eastern country. So which way is

Ubisoft going to go with *Prince Of Persia 3*? Nasty and profitable? Or nice and nerd-pleasing? Both! Two princes!

Our boy the prince has returned to Babylon from the spinny blades and temporal tomfoolery of the Island of

Time along with true-love arm-candy Kaileena. All, however, is not well. His kingdom has been in the wars during his absence (literally), and now every street-corner seems to be occupied by a malcontent with horns. PoP is captured, and Kaileena sacrifices herself and unleashes the oft-used and never-quite-destroyed sands of time to rescue him. And not only is our kid lost and alone in hostile territory, his time-meddling has given rise to something deep and dark within him.

TELL US MORE!

Ubisoft, ever wary of spoiling the story of what's touted as the last chapter of the current *Prince Of Persia* trilogy,

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.princeofpersiagame.com
ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Back to basics, but still great fighting
- Two princes, two fighting styles
- Intriguing stealth one-hit kills
- More moves, more fluidity
- On its way to being the best POP yet

HANGING ROOF GARDENS

BABYLON, BABYLON, BABYLON. DAVID GRAY HAS A LOT TO ANSWER FOR...



The cityscapes we've seen in the new *Prince Of Persia* are notable in how expansive they are. Much of the alternating action of claustrophobic corridors seems to mingle with the vast indoor areas of the last game, mixed in with a fair dollop of running and sneaking on the wide rooftops of Babylon.

Outdoor sections are impressively expansive, while there also seem to be far more environmental features for you to use during combat. Expect more rope-fighting, more wall-fighting and more pole-fighting; only this time expect to be doing so a bit more in the fresh air. Good for the lungs.

Another boring nightshift.



Babylon's seen better days.

won't fully elaborate on what's triggered the light and dark princes to occupy the same space – but it's clear that temporal-trickery has seen them live through different time-streams and that the dark prince has received the rougher end of the bargain. Thereby making him a bit of a moody grump. You'll be able to flick



The Daggertail: keep it away from small infants.

between each prince and each will have his own unique fighting style – the dark prince, for example, has an extremely novel weapon known as a Daggertail. Essentially a skipping rope with blades attached, it really is quite something when you see the dark prince sliding headfirst down a handy rope, drooping the Daggertail around a sentry's neck and decapitating him while his cohorts' backs are turned.

Surprisingly, stealth is a major contingent of the new game. We're not talking

Metal Gear Solid or *Thief* here, but what you will be seeing is an increase in the 'sneak, grab and kill' brand of killing that left so many skeletal warriors severed in two in the last game. We've seen the prince in motion (pinning himself in an alcove above an archway, waiting for the guard to walk beneath him and then smoothly falling to the floor with a flashing blade angled to slice him in half), and all the

skulking and skillful one-hit killing looks tremendously satisfying. Although, if you so choose, you can always bitch-slap them with your shopping list full of hard-core combos.

HOW DEEP IS YOUR LOVE?

There's also concerted effort at work here (albeit absent in these screenshots) to get back to the emotional depths of *The Sands Of Time*. Not only will you have a nice prince presumably a little more along the lines of his previous incarnation than *Warrior Within*'s "You bitch!" adolescent, but the return of previous characters is also promised (which, reading between the lines, essentially means Farah). There's also a return to the prince's accustomed interior-monologue and 'now, where were we?' story-telling dynamic.

It's abundantly clear that this is a case of trying to be all things to all people (or at least two things to two people), but the respect we hold for the Ubisoft's Montreal studios makes us feel confident that it's got the capabilities to pull it off. We'd go as far as saying that this has every chance of being the best of the *POP* bunch. Should a gravity gun be announced, however, you have every right to start worrying. [E]

"POP 3 is trying to be all things to all people, but we're confident Ubisoft Montreal can pull it off"

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

NEW TRICKS



ACTING EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ It has been said – often in this magazine – that point-and-click adventures are dead and buried, along with interactive CD-ROMs and Conservative governments. However, just because a genre isn't particular popular, it doesn't mean that the creative people behind those classic titles just pack up their C++ programming manual and walk off into a DX9-enhanced sunset. This month, we celebrate the return of two gaming heroes from the golden age of the LucasArts adventure – Ron Gilbert, creator of the SCUMM system and the *Monkey Island* series, and Tim Schafer, creator of *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*.

After we voted *The Secret Of Monkey Island* No.1 in our 'The 50 Greatest Gaming Moments Ever' feature in issue 153, Ron Gilbert met up with us in London for a drink and a chat for an upcoming feature. However, what soon became very clear was that even though Ron is a self-confessed "grumpy gamer" (his website is www.grumpygamer.com), he definitely isn't living in the past and is currently pitching a new idea for a game featuring his trademark humour and original ideas to various publishers.

Ron also mentioned how pleased he was that despite LucasArts' cancellation of *Full Throttle II*, his old friend Tim Schafer had returned with a brand-new videogame *Psychonauts*, which we have as our lead review on page 74. The game takes the bizarre, twisted American comedy that made titles such as *Sam & Max Hit The Road* so funny, and delivers a beautifully strange and original third-person action-adventure. It's hugely annoying that publisher Majesco has decided to only release this superb game in the USA, with a UK launch to be followed in the autumn, but read Will Porter's verdict anyway and install the excellent *Psychonauts* demo on this month's discs to see what all the fuss is about. Ron and Tim – the grumpy gamers at PC ZONE – welcome you back...



PSYCHONAUTS 74

Insane in the brain: we give Tim Schafer's utterly bizarre new game a thorough psychoanalysis.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM

QUESTIONS

1. What are you playing?
2. What's inside your head?



DAVE WOODS

PES 4

I've just had a spring clean, so not much at the moment



JAMIE SEFTON

Rome: Total War, PES 4

A never-satiated ego



78
SACRED: UNDERWORLD
More fun and games in Ancaria



88
CUSTOMPLAY GOLF
Chip it like Tiger. Nearly



90
INDIE ZONE
Underground developers' wares



92
REPLAY
Games that just won't die...

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

74 **PSYCHONAUTS**

78 **SACRED: UNDERWORLD**

80 **CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT**

82 **VIRTUALLY JENNA**

84 **IMPERIAL GLORY**

88 **STOLEN**

88 **CUSTOMPLAY GOLF**

89 **OMAR SHARIF 3D BRIDGE**

89 **CT SPECIAL FORCES:
FIRE FOR EFFECT**

90 **INDIE ZONE**

ALL THE LATEST FROM THE INDEPENDENT
DEVELOPMENT SCENE

92 **REPLAY**

CONFLICT: VIETNAM, WWII: FRONTLINE COMMAND
AND NO MAN'S LAND



IMPERIAL GLORY 84



CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT 80



VIRTUALLY JENNA 82



PAUL PRESLEY

Guild Wars, City Of Heroes (PvP)
and the Battlefield 2 Beta
Baby talk



WILL PORTER

Psychonauts and
Omar Sharif 3D Bridge
The things I've recently dug out
of my head have been either
mucus-y or waxy



SAM KILDSEN

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory,
Counter-Strike: Source
A whole heap o' wrongness



SUZY WALLACE

TOCA 3, Psychonauts
Not much at the moment.
My brain's on strike for less
cramped working conditions



STEVE HILL

Championship Manager Online,
Football Manager 2005
Dark thoughts



RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Rome: Total War,
Imperial Glory
A piece of sweetcorn,
trace elements of codeine
and some bogeys



An evil censor eats Pyrokinesis. Burn!

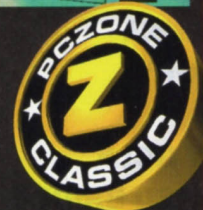


A quick diversion into Monkey Ball racing.

PSYCHONAUTS

■ \$29.99 | Pub: Majesco | Dev: DoubleFine | ETA: UK release TBC, Out Now in the US | www.psychonauts.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card



Will Porter finds a better cure for depression than Prozac, sunshine and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* mixed together

VENTILATION ducts. Stealth-o-meters. Levels in warehouses. Terrorists. A character whose presence in the game hinges on the fact that they have a pair of breasts. More levels in warehouses. A boss battle. Slow motion fighting. A bad joke. Games are getting so predictable – maybe they always have been.

Yesterday, for example, I played through a scene so familiar that I almost wept. There I was at the bottom of a lake fighting against a giant, mutated lungfish (how very

original). I entered its mind, and found myself a goliath in a city full of tiny, terrified lungfish. Reader, I rampaged. I picked up tanks and threw them in the sea, I destroyed buildings and heard tiny lungfish scream, "He's destroyed the puppy orphanage!" and in time I became part of the lungfish resistance movement. I also did some *Tony Hawk* grinding on a railway line, and climbed skyscrapers before blasting planes out of the sky. They called me Goggalor, and they feared me.

God, aren't games dull. Another day, another groundbreaking, dazzlingly original and truly sublime title from the imagination of one the most talented luminaries in modern gaming. Maybe we should just call it quits and give up. Games are shit.

RA RA RAZPUTIN

Psychonauts is a game of another age. There's been nothing quite like it since *Grim Fandango* and the last days of the LucasArts glory years – before everything went... Well,

you know how everything went. Today is a happy day, so let's not get too dewy-eyed and rose-tinted. Suffice to say one day LucasArts was the greatest comedic and imaginative force ever to grace the gaming world, then on the next day someone said "Let there be *Super Bombad Racing!*" and then there was shite.

But, like I say, this isn't a day for moping. If we were in a *Star Wars* film then we'd be way beyond *Empire*, we'd be dancing about on Endor with the Ewoks and singing

(the original) 'nub nub' song while Luke goes off to burn his dad. *Psychonauts*, developed by Tim 'I made *Grim Fandango*' Schafer and his gang at DoubleFine, is a return to the good old days. Tainted by a few gameplay issues, marred by the odd mentality of 'collecting shiny things' that taints modern kiddie gaming, but we're really



INPERSPECTIVE

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 77%
Does what *Psychonauts* does only with a lot more violence, less charm and only unintentional humour. But with physics.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 89%
More serious than *Psychonauts* and with less control issues, *Beyond Good & Evil* nevertheless presses many of the same buttons.



One level features a brain-bound, super-crazy disco party...

looking at something here that borders on creative genius.

RUSSIA'S GREATEST

I won't be able to get across everything about this game in a four-page review; it's too mad, there's too much of it and it probably won't make sense. I don't want to ruin anything for you either, so I'm keeping schtum on the game's best bits. I've given away the Goggalor stuff, and already I feel dirty. With this in mind, let's get down to some hardcore reviewing.

You play as a young chap called Razputin, Raz for short.

You've run away from the circus and a father who wants you to train as an acrobat rather than channel your burgeoning psychic abilities. Now at a summer camp for children with such talents (an *X-Men*-style academy for those who will become secret-agent Psychonauts), you have a day and a night to harness your psychic abilities. Leaping in and out of the minds of teachers and assembled lunatics, you pick up more and more skills (Telekinesis, Pyrokinesis, Clairvoyance – like a pre-adolescence *Psi-Ops*), while in

the camp, conspiracy and mystery is afoot. Someone's been stealing brains.

The best point of comparison here is the *Zelda* games. Each brain you enter is essentially a themed dungeon, with its own boss, its own rules and its own personality. When you're not invading someone's personal space though, you're running around the camp swapping meticulous one-liners with the other kids, buying things, digging for arrowhead currency and making your way to the next port of call that the plot demands.

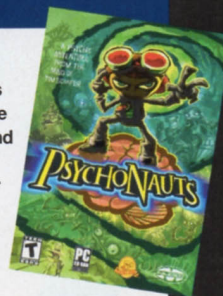


The psyche of this individual provides the biggest laughs since *Sam & Max*.

USA-ONLY!

IMPORT OR WAIT? IT'S UP TO YOU...

It's annoying. It's upsetting. But *Psychonauts* is currently only available to buy in the USA. There are several reputable sites that will sell and send US games to the UK, but if you do plan on importing, check the small print. If you'd prefer a UK copy, Majesco is hopefully sorting out a release for the autumn, but nothing is set in stone just yet. The *PC ZONE* campaign for a UK release of *Psychonauts* begins here!



Emotional baggage whimpers in corners of untidy minds.

Play the demo and you'll find out exactly why *Psychonauts*' brain 'dungeons' are marvellous. Every one is just so different from the other. They contain enough puzzle elements to make you feel like you're playing an old-school point-and-click (often to the point of frustration, admittedly). They're each themed so well, and so imaginatively, that they never ever get repetitive – you simply never know what's coming next, and you're almost always delighted, surprised and somewhat baffled when the next setting pops up. They also play with perspective like no other game on record. I don't know how big DoubleFine's art team is, but the amount of

them. Seeing as I'm hiding the best bits, and because you're probably suspicious of my superlative usage, let's have a look at one of the least good brains levels – Raz's own, that he returns to whenever he gets new powers to get deeper into his subconscious, and the conspiracy that seems to be reflected there.

It starts off with an old caravan (the place where Raz was born) that's filled with static. You walk into the static and it suddenly freezes, Raz complains that he can't move and you have to bash yourself out of what turns out to be a giant egg. In the egg with you is a white bunny who you follow through the dank caverns of

"Another day, another groundbreaking, dazzling original and truly sublime title"

design work that's gone into *Psychonauts* is staggering, and they almost certainly don't get paid enough.

LOVE MACHINE

And so you find yourself reattaching luggage tags to emotional baggage (that whimper in corners of the mind), cleaning up mental cobwebs and essentially going deeper and deeper into the subconscious until you face the demon that fuels your subject's mental anguish – and defeat

your mind, fighting against censors (office workers in suits) whose job it is to stamp out errant thoughts – thoughts like you. Should you get stuck you can wave a piece of bacon near your ear, and your mentor will stick his head out of your lughole and give handy tips. And this is the most conventional level *Psychonauts* has to offer. Understandably enough, the heads of conspiracy freaks and Napoleon complexes are far more bonkers, and incidentally,



No Quarter from Goggalor

LUNGFISHOPOLIS LIVE

Having played this, we can't help but wonder what a level in Tim Schafer's head would be like...

the best bits of the game. I could tell you what happens in them, but then I'd have to shoot you. And then myself.

Did I mention it was funny? It's very, very funny. Fizzy pop snorted out through nose funny. It's easily the most charming and unrelentingly amusing game that I've played since, well, *Grim Fandango*. But it's also, again like *Grim Fandango*, pretty damn dark. You're entering people's heads you see, and they're not necessarily happy places. The second head you go into is that of po-faced Agent Nein, he of straight laces and nerd glasses, and should you break open the safe containing his memories you'll find scenes of the death of his mother. Likewise, should you go exploring too deeply in the crazy, disco-funk head of Milla Vodello, then you'll find things to suggest that her happy-go-lucky party fever is perhaps a front to cover up some overwhelmingly tragic events. There's some extremely clever stuff going on here that goes far beyond the normal treatment of videogame characters. It's a bit of a crap thing to say, but here you actually 'get inside' the people around you, and learn what makes them tick.

The characters themselves are wonderful, and none are more wonderful than Dogan –



Like Nellie the Elephant, Raz is running away from the circus.

who is without doubt the star of the show. He's a spherical blue kid, and is severely traumatised due to the fact that whenever he takes off his tinfoil hat, people's heads tend to explode. His childhood insanity and confused ramblings make for some real, heartfelt laughs, but you genuinely start giving a shit about him – just as the superb voice acting and wonderful character design leads you to really hate the bullies and really find the

irritating kids irritating. It's a shame that you lose a lot of this halfway through the game when the plot renders all but Raz into mindless automatons, but you just can't wait to thwart the evil and get Dogan back to normal again. If you consider a child who kills squirrels with his mind as normal.

I have love for this game. Great, great love. So the next few paragraphs are going to hurt. There are problems with *Psychonauts*. There, I've said it.

Problems. Big ones. Deep, deep breath.

IT WAS A SHAME

The first one is that this is a console game. Mouse and keyboard, the way I played it, doesn't work at all – the correspondence between mouse-look and WASD-move is out of whack, and can render some boss battles a nightmare. Combat is done through laser mind-blasts with a lock-on button, mouse-tap thwacking

MEET THE GANG

THE KIDS IN *PSYCHONAUTS* ARE AMAZINGLY NON-ANNOYING. IMAGINE AN EPISODE OF *WHY DON'T YOU?* WITH EXPLODING HEADS... UNBELIEVABLY, IT'S THAT GOOD

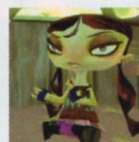


DOGAN

Dogan hears voices that prompt him to kill things. None too bright, and voiced like a sleepy toddler, he's the best thing in the game.

BOBBY

A ginger menace you cannot avoid detesting, Bobby loves nothing more than to inflict pain on others. Just thinking of his stupid ginger face makes us angry.



LILI

Raz's self-appointed girlfriend is smart, and the relationship that grows between her and our hero is nothing short of heart-warming.



"Fancy seeing you here..."

and whatever other psychic powers you have selected – it feels clunky and not at all in keeping with the quality of the rest of the game. Accessing inventories and assigning skills also impinges on the action. I hate to say it, but marvellous as it is, *Psychonauts* is better suited to Xbox. But, better to play it on PC with a gamepad than not at all, because (remember!), it's brilliant.

The camera is pretty dodgy as well. On wide-open mindscapes (such as the otherwise remarkable Napoleon Complex level) it's easy to get lost, and every now and then you won't be able to see where the hell you're going. What's more, remember how I said playing *Psychonauts* gives you the same feeling as when you were playing an old LucasArts point-and-click? Well, do you remember the frustration you used to feel when you got stuck? Sometimes for hours?



A squirrel, blissfully unaware of its approaching grisly fate.



Deeper subtexts range from rejection to familial death.

Well Raz's adventures do that too, but whereas *Monkey Island* et al used to make you feel as if you weren't clever enough, when you get well and truly stuck in *Psychonauts* you feel its more a case of bad design rather than your own limitations. True, waving bacon near your ear can give you comprehensive advice from your mentor – but there are some occasions when he's useless and your frustration and anger mount and mount. I was lucky enough to have a fellow games journalist on MSN a few levels ahead of me to fill in the gaps, but gamefaqs.com will almost certainly become a vital part of your Psychonautical enjoyment.

Any other quibbles? Well, yes. I felt that a lot of the collecting of various bits and

bobs was a bit tacked on – so much so that I've given it its own personal boxout (see 'Collection Point', below). And the FMV's a bit ropey compared to the shiny in-game action. And there's a bit just before the end that's really, really rubbish – but I can't give away. But you simply must understand that you'll forgive all this (well, most of it) because *Psychonauts* will make you feel so happy that you'll want to go to America, visit DoubleFine and give them all a big cuddle.

HOW HE CARRIED ON
I've read back over my review, and I've realised that I haven't got anywhere close to describing the fun that *Psychonauts* provides, despite its limitations. This is because there is no way to truly



Wave bacon in your ear and help is never far away.



A handy Underground system helps you get around.

appreciate the brilliance of the game apart from playing it. You can't convey it – it's like telling someone an anecdote that was "funny at the time". Even though there isn't one duff character in the whole shebang, barely a line falls flat and some of the levels (one in particular – the "I am a road-mender" level for those in the know) are so wilfully and gleefully insane that they surpass anything 'alternative' that I've seen, heard or played in a very long time.

I have no idea where Schafer gets his inspiration from. Dali? Python? LSD? I don't know, and I don't care – just so long as he's reinstalled as king of gaming. And this means, friend, that as soon as this game is released in this country, you

have to buy it. Because the only way that we're going to get more games like this, games of such absolute joy, is to buy them. The only language understood by the ****s who run the game industry (and yes, that began with the letter c, and no, my grandmother isn't proud) is to talk in their language – the language of cold, hard cash – and all the *Sims* expansion packs that go with it.

It's very important that this isn't a commercial failure and so, despite the camera problems and the moments of frustration, I beg of you to sample its delights. It's only available on import at the moment, but word is that UK distribution will happen this autumn. Buy a gamepad now while stocks last (forget about the mouse and keyboard) and make sure you flex your brain at least three times a day – it's in for some expanding, and you need it to be ready for the workout that *Psychonauts* will provide. [A+]

COLLECTION POINT

A SHORT ESSAY ON THE ACT OF HOARDING BITS OF BRAIN FOR FUN AND PROFIT

I hate collecting things in games, especially when you feel that you're not really doing it for any particular reason. *Psychonauts* has you collecting figments (neon-coloured patches of people's imagination) in order to level up, but it also complicates matters with secret items, machines that convert some things into other things (never quite understood what) and various other bits and pieces. I don't care about this kind of thing in *LEGO Star Wars* or *Harry Potter* (as kids seem to like it) but it often becomes quite a nuisance in a game as wonderful as *Psychonauts*. Still, life goes on...



Figments: gotta catch 'em all!

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Slick, funny, warm and smart
- ✓ Mind-bending level design
- ✓ Great characters; funny, sparkling dialogue
- ✗ Iffy controls and a somewhat dodgy camera
- ✗ In all honesty, not a PC game

90

Set to warp your tiny little mind

SACRED: UNDERWORLD

FULL VERSION OF
EITHER SACRED OR
SACRED PLUS REQUIRED



Price: £19.99 | Dev: Ascaron | Pub: Ascaron | ETA: Out Now | www.sacred-game.com

REQUIRES: PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 16MB DirectX8 3D card DESIRES: P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX9 3D card

Suzu Wallace dusts off her armour and prepares to rid Ancaria of its evil scum for the second time...



Looks like it's fish for supper again tonight.

IT MUST BE great being a hero. Take *Sacred* for example. In it, my vampiress character is revered by the local townsfolk, decked out in the finest armour that money can buy and practically drowning in gold. Meanwhile, back in the real world, I get woken up by my neighbour's kids who just can't seem to appreciate that any time before midday on a Sunday is for sleeping, I haven't purchased

new clothes for months and my bank account is drier than the Sahara. So when *Underworld* came along, I was more than ready to dive back into the fantasy world of Ancaria to find out just what the expansion has to offer.

AS YOU WERE

Fans of the original will be happy to know that the story picks up from where *Sacred* left off – although let's face it, it's little more than a thinly-veiled disguise to shunt you from location to location. If you were fooled by the title into thinking that you'd be spending all of your time exploring the dark crevices of the world, you'd be wrong.

Underworld is set in new areas that expand the already existing world by 40 per cent, and there's plenty of variety, from tropical islands to treetop walkways. The isometric engine hasn't been touched but everything still looks pretty enough, with



Never tell the truth when asked: "Does my bum look big in this?"

cascading waterfalls, bloody shrines and other neat little features littering the landscape.

Disappointingly, it only features 30 new enemies and although these are varied, it means you find yourself hacking up some of the same enemies throughout the title. Plenty of new items, armour and weapons are available to beef your character up with and perhaps most interestingly, two new characters have been added: the male dwarf and female daemon.

The dwarf is pretty typical of the vertically-challenged folk, but as well as the standard head-splitting axe

typically favoured by his kin, he's taken a leaf out of Charlton Heston's book and comes equipped with an arsenal of guns. Meanwhile, the daemon sports horns, cloven feet and little flappy wings, but despite being able to summon protective orbs and make life-sucking tentacles appear from dead enemies, she's lacking in the devilish powers we were hoping for, being more of a melee character than anything else. Also, if you grow rather attached to your *Sacred* character, you can choose to import them in or jump straight in with a fully equipped and levelled version of one of the new characters.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Sadly, Ascaron hasn't given *Underworld* the level of polish that was needed after *Sacred*,



This is a job for Rentokil.

and as such it's prone to the same irritations as before. Voice-acting ranges from serviceable to ear-shatteringly awful (check out the new daemon character), the story is negligible, boss mobs don't provide enough of a challenge and the combo system is still practically useless.

It's a real shame because, given some TLC, *Underworld* could have provided the perfect old-school hack'n'slash vehicle for *Diablo* fans to slice their way through. Although like *Sacred*, it's great mindless fun, if you were holding out for a deeper storyline and more polished gameplay, you may be left a little underwhelmed. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

DIABLO II

Reviewed Issue 93, Score 72%
Despite getting on a bit in game terms, this hack'n'slasher definitely set the standard for others to follow. A bit simplistic in terms of gameplay and story, but it's still a firm RPG favourite even today.

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

Reviewed Issue 116, Score 94%
A slow-burning, non-linear novel to *Sacred*'s hack'n'slash, on-rails comic book, this epic 3D RPG is incredibly rewarding, despite the poor NPC interaction.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ The old-school visuals still look gorgeous
- ✓ Extends the already massive world even further
- ✓ Great way to while away the hours
- ✗ Still prone to the same niggles
- ✗ Could have included more new enemies
- ✗ Gameplay and storyline remain overly simplistic

72

Under-performer

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CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT

£29.99 | Pub: Take 2 | Dev: Destineer | ETA: Out Now | www.firsttofight.com

REQUIRES Pill 1.3GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card with T&L **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card with pixel shader

When it comes to any kind of combat, Michael Filby is usually the first to leg it. Will this military training tool make a man of him?

WHILE SOME US senators bleat on about the evils of gaming, their very own armed forces are perfectly happy to plough their cash into furthering the cause of our humble

pastime. First they fund the online recruiting tool that is *America's Army*, and then pay for training software to be developed upon which *Full Spectrum Warrior* is based (although admittedly we're rather glad about the latter as it's rather splendid). Apparently, neither were good enough for the US Marine Corps though, as they've been throwing their capital and expertise at what is a training tool for them, but *Close Combat: First To Fight* for us.

Incidentally, it's worth pointing out from the start that the *Close Combat* tag is a bit of a crafty misnomer, as it has little to do with the top-down strategy games that came before it. Instead, *CC:FTF* joins the ever-

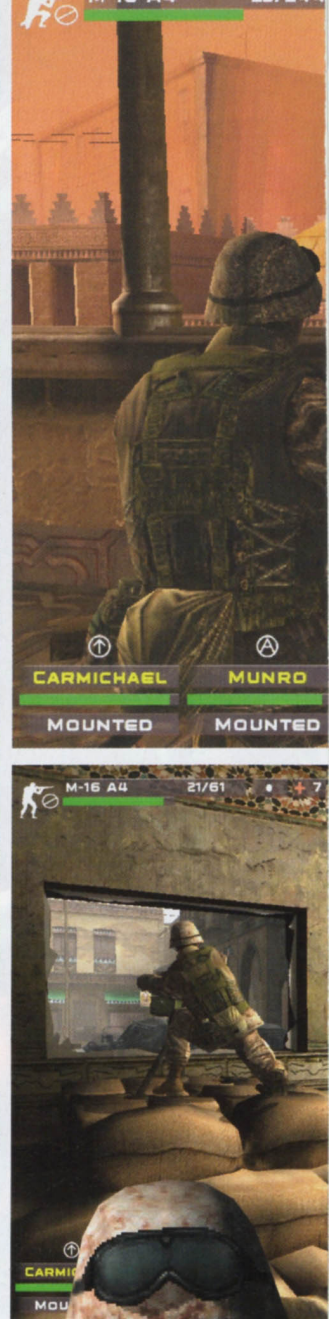
growing ranks of squad-based FPS titles vying for your hard-earned cash, albeit with strategy overtones that prevent it from being classed as a straight-out shooter.

MIDLING EAST

The theatre of war is Beirut of 2006, where a winning mix of dictatorships, foreign interference and political instability has given the Americans an excuse (assuming they need one these days) to send in their finest. Your job is to lead a four-man fire-team through the war-torn streets on missions mostly involving getting from A to B and occasionally attempting to capture or kill an enemy leader, with the odd set-

piece thrown in for good measure.

A few basic squad commands are always available, so you can pretend to know what you're doing as you stumble around the streets, such as getting your guys to follow you or to hold their position. You can also instruct them to take up firing positions by looking at an area and hitting a key. The AI of your squad



INPERSPECTIVE

BROTHERS IN ARMS

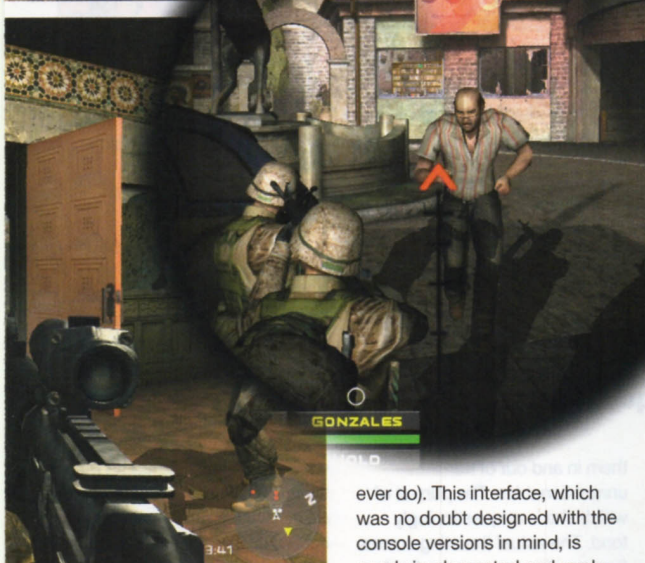
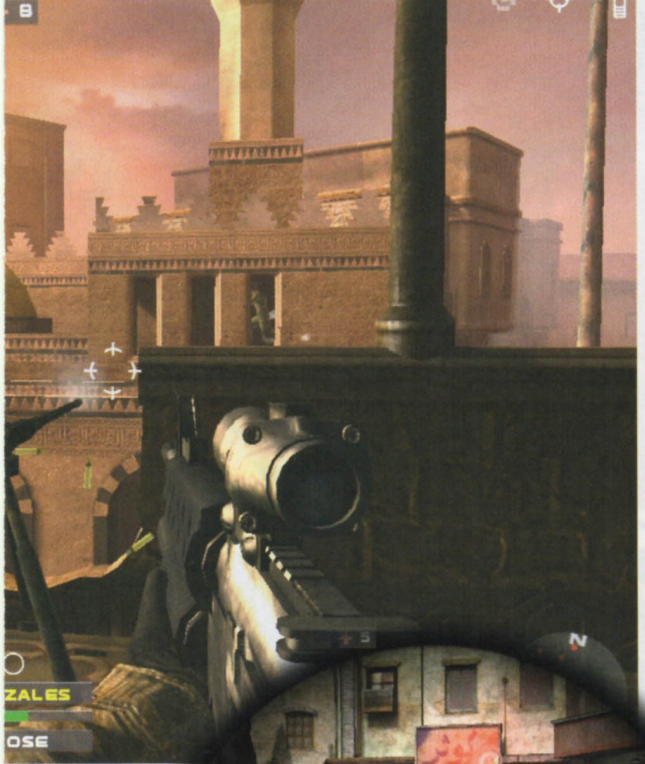
Reviewed Issue 153, Score 87%

More squad-based action with, crucially, AI that works across the board. The WWII setting may be getting old-hat to some, but the narrative puts *CC:FTF* to shame.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

Reviewed Issue 147, Score 80%

With far more focus on the tactics, the lack of direct control may frustrate action-seekers. Easily the best modern-day military strategy for our money, though.



Shut the bloody door!

is mostly quite decent, and you'll often be pleasantly surprised to see them taking up sensible firing positions behind a wrecked car, or lining up by a corner and taking pot-shots at snipers you might otherwise have missed.

The competency of your squad's AI isn't entirely consistent though. Sometimes they blatantly disobey your orders or run off on their own and get caught out in the open, which becomes frustrating when they end up getting shot through no fault of your own.

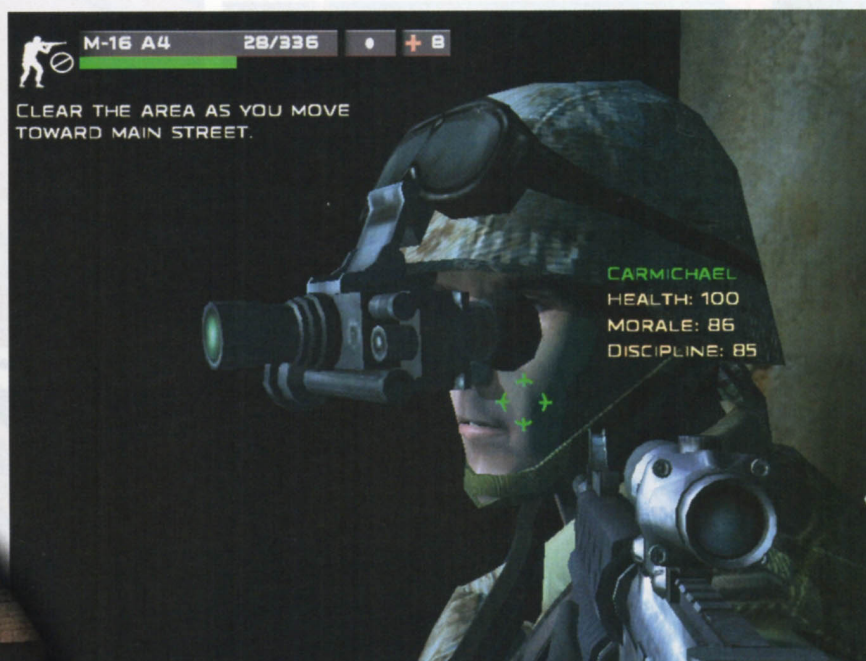
More squad commands are available to you through a context-sensitive menu that's brought up by looking at the area you're interested in, holding down the right mouse-button and selecting an option. These include ordering your men to lay down suppressing fire, or shouting for your enemy to drop their weapons (which they hardly

ever do). This interface, which was no doubt designed with the console versions in mind, is poorly implemented and rarely works as well as it should.

SHOT DOWN

CC:FTF is also let down by even more inconsistencies. For example, there's a neat option to order your men to fling a grenade into a room, then rush in afterwards to clear it out (much like in *SWAT 4*). When it works, rushing in with your men and watching AK-wielding militants biting the dust all around you is enormously satisfying. For some reason though, the option to order a room to be cleared is rarely displayed, which only leaves one decidedly less tactical decision – you barging in trying to shoot anything that moves and invariably taking a few slugs in the process.

Some commands are fairly useful, such as the ability to call in an air-strike. Sadly, much of the fun and challenge is removed by virtually signposting where and when these options can be taken. When you encounter a large square full of OPFORs (or bad guys to us mere civilians),



Everyone's a Sam Fisher wannabe these days...

GAME OVER MAN, GAME OVER

THE ART OF APPLYING FIRST AID

Being in charge of a four-man fire-team makes their safety your responsibility. You carry a quantity of first aid kits around with you that can give you a quick health boost, but if any of your guys are flagging (most likely down to their occasional spells of monumental stupidity and not doing what they're told), you can apply a first aid kit to them using the context menu.

If one of your guys goes down though, you have a limited time in which to get the immediate surroundings secured so you can call in a corpsman. This military magician appears from nowhere, no matter where you are, and evacuates your wounded soldier to safety (again, as if by magic). Lose more than one man or get wasted yourself though, and the plug is pulled on the mission, promptly sending you back to the last checkpoint.



As if by magic, the Corpsman appeared.

you know that the option to call in sniper support will have appeared in the context-menu. You see some heavy artillery trundling in and, sure enough, the mortar strike option appears.

The narrative is handled by 'INN' news stories presented by Americans with chucklesome names like Bennett Urban, summing up what results your previous mission yielded on the war effort and reporting on the situation you're heading into next. Other than supporting M's

observation in *GoldenEye* that the US government gleans most of its intelligence from *CNN*, the stories do little to help draw you into the game.

CHOCABLOCK

Although the environments see you handling a good mixture of indoor and outdoor combat encounters, the muddy and slightly blocky look to the environments do little to distinguish each level, and the linear objectives are

compounded by the claustrophobic map design. The most serious deficiencies in the game, other than the botched interface, lie in the unconvincing enemy AI and the wishy-washy handling of the weapons which reminds us of other unsatisfying shooters like *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury*.

While not a universally terrible effort, the tense stand-offs and tight urban combat is let down by the weak interface and poor consistency in your squad's AI. Although lowering the difficulty setting will add a more *Republic Commando*-style arcade slant to the missions and lower your reliance on your squad, this pretty much defeats the object of buying what's purported to be a squad-based strategic shooter in the first place.

If the Americans were using this to learn how to fight, they'd be going around making questionable tactical decisions, shouting cheesy soundbites and shooting at each other all the time. Hang on... [E]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Some of the action is enjoyably tense
- ✓ Checkpoints not too far apart
- ✓ Squad AI usually quite good...
- ✗ ...But sometimes frustratingly idiotic
- ✗ Poor enemy AI
- ✗ Weakly implemented console-centric interface

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Close, but no cigar



Thing is, she doesn't really look much like Jenna Jameson...



We've done this so often we're starting to find Hill's disembodied head strangely alluring.



"You're nearly where? I don't follow you..."



Look at the passion in those eyes.

VIRTUALLY JENNA

■ \$9.95 (three-day trial) then \$29.95 every 30 days | Pub: XStream3D | Dev: XStream3D

ETA: Out Now | www.virtuallyjenna.com

REQUIRES PIII 300MHz, 256MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and a broad mind **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Will Porter went blind the other day. This answers most of our questions...

BLIMEY, this one's a bit strong. It's really, really rude. Think of the furthest you can imagine a sex game pushing the envelope (fnar fnar) of rudeness. Well *Virtually Jenna* goes further, far further, and even provides a brillo pad function for you to wipe up the associated bodily fluids.

As you can

imagine, great care has gone into the gathering of the surrounding screenshots (I spent hours on it), because you get to see everything, from intimate piercings to wagging ball-sacks. We're not in Kansas anymore ladies and gentlemen, this game could steal innocence from *Death Row* – we're in over-eighteen territory with a carnal vengeance.

NAKED AMBITION

Jenna Jameson is, as my gran would say, a bit of a hussie – perhaps even a scarlet woman. She's also as fit as a butcher's dog, or at least I've heard she is – I personally would have no idea about it and could pass no comment. In her digital incarnation you can position her (or one of her friends) in a variety of poses that leave very little to the imagination – some with a male friend on the threshold of penetration and some without. Indeed, on those without you can select a variety of household items (bananas, corn on the cob, cigars, giant plastic memorabilia...) and plunge

them in and out of her unmentionables. The pursuit of which she is unquestioningly fond. The actual thrusting comes from moving your mouse back and forth, although should your hands be otherwise engaged there's an automatic setting that enables your lucky computer to bring Jenna off on its tod.

RAM RAIDER

But is the game any good? Of course not, it's utter bollocks. Although the camera controls, boob jiggle and the rendering of specific body parts are actually quite impressive, if you get kicks from Jenna's cold dead eyes or watching Barbie and Ken automatons joylessly shagging then you should be kept on a government register. Continually raising Jenna's orgasm bar isn't much fun (though certainly easier than the task is in reality), and organising a porno photoshoot isn't much better.

If there were some sort of game in which you could chat-up the porn stars *Leisure Suit Larry*-style, then at least it would be slightly more emotionally involving than meeting them in a photo studio, presenting

them with a courgette and raising an eyebrow.

The ultimate test, though, is whether or not it 'arouses you'. So it was that, in the pursuit of journalistic integrity, I gave it a bash yesterday when everyone went to lunch. I can honestly report that the only moment of excitement was when Prezzler came back for his coat. It's also wickedly expensive – \$9.95 for a three-day trial, then \$29.95 for every 30 days after that – with extra toys, girls and sexy hijinks being added on an apparently regular basis.

Because I really want to get a quote of mine on the website I'll say this: *Virtually Jenna* is a step into a brave new world for pornographic entertainment. The first version is as sexy as a bucket of fish, but as more emotion goes into faces and user-interaction grows, this kind of thing will probably overtake VHS, DVD and the Freemans catalogue for teenage kicks. And we'll all drive flying cars and have holidays on the moon too. [E]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Really, really rude
- ✓ Hilarious 'sperm-trigger' button
- ✗ Gets boring very quickly
- ✗ Might get caught playing it
- ✗ Ridiculously expensive

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Ironically lacking in spunk

IMPERSPECTIVE

SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE

Reviewed Issue 142, Score 48%

Compared to *Jenna*, *Singles* is about as rude as a repeat showing of the *Antiques Roadshow*. Yet it's still somehow better.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 89%

If we're talking about finding gaming characters alluring, then look no further. Jade wouldn't do half the things that *Jenna* does though.





DRAGONSHARD

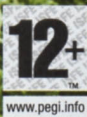
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ATARI

IMPERIAL GLORY

■ £34.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Pyro Studios | ETA: May | www.imperialglory.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and an Internet connection



They do say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, which is why *Richie Shoemaker* remains one of a kind

OVER the course of three games, *Total War* developer The Creative Assembly has established itself as the most consistent and innovative company in the strategy sphere. Its games have proved to be immediately accessible and deeply engrossing, fusing 2D turn-based and 3D real-time strategy into a vast and cohesive whole, that has earned the UK studio critical and commercial success.

However, despite the awards and the ceaseless acclaim, the appearance of *Imperial Glory* must surely be

the ultimate accolade, for as all developers know, you've only truly made it when everyone else starts borrowing your ideas. While a handful of games have in part been inspired by *Total War*, Pyro's wholesale lifting of the *Total War* concept is the first to be, well, total.

ATTACK OF A CLONE

Branding *Imperial Glory* a clone may be unfair, but it's accurate, for without The Creative Assembly having done all the groundwork, *IG* would in all likelihood have turned out much like Pyro's previous RTS offering *Praetorians*. That's not to belittle either game (*Praetorians* was an underrated cracker, in my opinion), just an undeniable fact.

Similarly, just because *IG* is in all but name a *Total War* game, it would be a mistake to just dismiss it as being derivative, as *Imperial Glory* often manages to counter the *Total War* series with a small feature or addition that makes it ever-so-slightly distinct.

The first of these is, of course, the Napoleonic era during which the central campaign is set – specifically 1791-1830, a period when most of Europe seemed to be at war pretty much all of the time. Choosing one of five warring nations (England, Austria,

INPERSPECTIVE

ROME: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 93%

If you like strategy games, you simply must have a copy of this title in your collection. Nothing else need be said.

COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS

Reviewed Issue 154, Score 80%

It's 2D, but don't dismiss GSC Game World's effort for that. The battles are grand in scale and the interface is an absolute joy. Personally, I found the battles to be a shade more enjoyable than in *Imperial Glory*, but the *Total War* bits are a chore.

Prussia, France or Russia), the aim is to secure the most victory points before the sands of time run out, whether by military domination, trading and research, peaceful diplomacy, or very probably all of the above. Regardless of the strategy you employ, the campaign is played out across a map of Europe, with you and your AI neighbours taking turns to shuffle armies between territories, set up trade routes and erect the necessary buildings so that you may rake in more resources, increase productivity or recruit the units that will ensure victory.

Of course, military expansion will be the most obvious and certainly the most enjoyable method of progression, but it is entirely possible to win the game without resorting to violence. As England, I managed this by maintaining a formidable Navy to protect lucrative trade routes, whilst

France, Austria and Prussia squabbled over Central Europe.

As an economic power I was untouchable for most of the campaign, with trading outposts scattered across Europe, and merchant ships busy ferrying goods between ports. England was stinking rich, and I could buy off any nations who started getting shirty. Such a strategy would be unlikely to work had I been on the throne of Russia, for example, but my point is that although the choice of nations is small, each one offers a very different challenge.

DIPLOMATIC IMPUNITY

Whichever route to victory you choose to follow, Pyro has ensured that there is always plenty to do. Given the brief

stretch of history during which the game is set there is a sizeable research tree to plough through, that offers over 70 different technologies set across three rather arbitrary phases. It's not a broad selection by any stretch, seeing as you must research every tech in each phase before moving to the next, but it allows you to further specialise whatever strategy you choose to follow and get a brief advantage over competitors.

Research is further expanded with a series of quests that become unlocked as new technologies are mastered. Typically requiring you to amass a certain amount of resources or population

"By far the most enjoyable aspect of the campaign is the diplomacy system"

units, by completing these quests you are given certain bonuses that can offer a quick advantage over other nations.

But by far the most enjoyable and important aspect of the turn-based campaign is the diplomacy system, which allows you to make and break alliances, declare war, request rights of passage, trade and lend military units to coalition allies. By building embassies and newspaper offices in foreign countries, you can subvert other

nations to your way of thinking. If no other nation makes a move you can, in time, peaceably annex the province and make it your own. And should another nation look likely to do the same to a province bordering yours, a build-up of force may well put them off – although you can expect a hit on your



Cannon-fire throws bodies into the air.



I believe the expression is "woot".



It's not looking good for the boys with the big guns.



Securing the high ground is essential.



"And that's why Britain rules the waves."



Frozen lakes and cannons don't mix.

"However skilful you are at bending governments to your manifesto, the times are turbulent and military conflict is inevitable"

ALL AT SEA

WHAT'S THE STORY, *IMPERIAL GLORY*? ONLY THAT THIS HAS THE BEST SEA BATTLES EVER CREATED

If there's one area in which *Imperial Glory* sticks one in the eye of *Total War*, it's with its enjoyably complex sea battles. Manoeuvrable sloops, frigates and heavily-armed galleons are the three classes of vessel at your disposal, and commanding just one is a far more involving affair than directing light infantry.

Using the wind to keep up a decent rate of knots, timing is essential: get it wrong and watch your balls plop harmlessly in the water – even around enemy vessels directly in your firing arc. Should you wish to board and capture a ship to add to your fleet, the right shot must be used to disable it and eliminate the crew. When firing, you can adjust the firing arc to pepper a wide area, or concentrate your fire in order to quickly eliminate the enemy. What's for sure is that the sea battles are a star feature, and one that The Creative Assembly is sure to adapt and make its own.



An 18th century booze cruise in full swing.

standing, one that's especially harsh should you carry out your threat without first declaring war. In short, it's refreshing to enjoy a wargame where diplomacy is given such priority – especially so here, as it's integrated so well within the framework of the game.

COMMAND & CONQUER

However skilful you are at bending governments to your manifesto, given the turbulent times during which the game is set, military conflict is inevitable. As with *Total War*, should two armies meet, the game switches into a real-time view of the province in dispute, with both armies facing off across a 3D landscape. To anyone familiar with the aforementioned *TW* games, the interface, views and controls will be immediately familiar.

Units are directed across the map as squads, with you able to set formations and drag out a line so that the troops will face in the desired direction when or if they reach their destination. What may come as a shock is the pace of the battles themselves, for whilst essentially *IG* requires the same

paper-scissors-stone mentality as *Total War*, you will have to deal with weapons with ranges far greater than slings and arrows, and mounted soldiers that, unburdened by armour and heavy lances, will charge swiftly and decisively. The dynamics of combat may be the same – seek high ground, fake the enemy into your line of fire, cover your flanks, kick ass – but the pace of the 3D battle

sequences make *Rome*'s seem positively catatonic.

NAPOLEON DYNAMITE

Imperial Glory is undoubtedly varied and accessible, but it still comes up short when compared to the mighty *Rome*. The spread of units is impressive, but the difference between many of them is so slight that it pays not to vary your force beyond three or four unit types. AI is competent, with troops retreating when overwhelmed, yet advancing into certain death perhaps a bit too readily.

Similarly, while soldiers will take cover among trees and inside buildings, the enemy do tend to break cover at the first sign of trouble. No bad thing, but whichever nation you happen to be fighting, they each seem to follow the same tactics – you would expect the French to perhaps be more aggressive, for example. There are other niggles too: such as

the fact that defending forces cannot be deployed as they can in *Total War*, making the centrepiece battles for the capital cities seem less of a siege and more of a land-grab.

However, taking all the criticisms into account, it would take an unforgiving soul to be unimpressed with what Pyro has created for *Imperial Glory*, which is far and away the most spectacular wargame ever to be set during the Napoleonic era. It might not be up to quite the same standard as *Total War*

in the scale and depth of its 3D battles, but graphically, the game just nudges ahead.

All in all, it's not far from forcing a stalemate. What's more, with two full campaigns to enjoy, a customisable skirmish option that can be taken online, and a small collection of historical encounters (Waterloo, Austerlitz), there's plenty to be getting on with before The Creative Assembly starts making serious plans to drag itself away from ancient history. **PCW**



England's finest.



Imperial Glory features destructible buildings.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fast-paced 3D battles
- ✓ Diplomacy and wargaming combine to great effect
- ✓ Sea battles work very well
- ✗ Not as evolved or as challenging as *Rome: Total War*
- ✗ Buildings could've been implemented better

85

Total Glory

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STOLEN

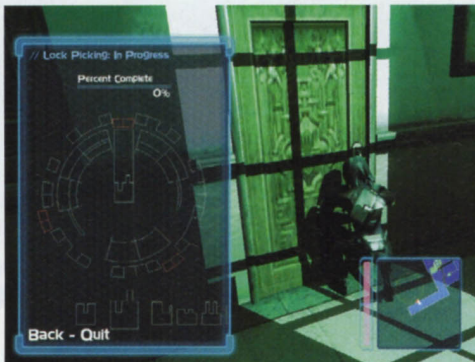
■ £29.99 | Pub: Hip Interactive | Dev: Blue52 | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 64MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

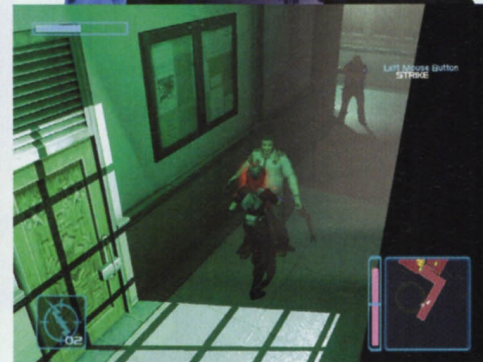
Richie Shoemaker finds a stealth games that should stick to the shadows



She's not exactly Samantha Fisher.



All the right moves, badly executed.



Guards don't stay down forever, more's the pity.

WHATEVER A

man can do, a woman can accomplish just as well. That's the theory anyway, and here to prove her mettle in the testosterone-fuelled evasion industry is Anya, a light-fingered lass with an alluring cleavage and star of *Stolen*. She's no government agent mind; rather, she's a common tea leaf of the

near future, decked out in tight-fitting garb and all manner of high-tech gadgetry to help her avoid getting caught by the fuzz.

And my, does she get about some; swinging across huge gaps, running up vertical walls and flipping to out-of-reach ledges are all breathless examples of her athletic prowess. However, when it

comes to doing the sneaky, Anya is only pale imitation of the great Sam Fisher.

The problems start early on with sprints and somersaults that are easily performed to the point where much of the game feels like it's on rails. On meeting guards the experience quickly deteriorates, with watchmen that seem to lack the required

sensory awareness to perform their duty, and an arsenal that's less than capable when you do eventually stumble, quite literally, into them.

Combat is laughably simplistic; just pummel the mouse button until someone keels over. It's all non-lethal takedowns too, so there's no satisfaction in completing a

stylish kill either, just the frustration of knowing that in a few seconds the lardy-arsed guards will be back on their feet and flicking on their torches. Sorry Anya, this is a man's world.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**
Criminal

35

CUSTOMPLAY GOLF

■ Price: £29.99 | Pub: Fusion Labs | Dev: CustomPlay Games | ETA: June 3

REQUIRES PIII 600MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Sam Kieldsen putts from the rough

GOLF GAMES tend to be pretty similar. Some are more polished and better-looking than others, but the aim is the same: you click or swing your mouse to hit the ball until it drops into the hole and that's about it.

Occasionally a title will proffer some form of innovation. EA's *Tiger Woods* franchise stands out from the below-par pack by letting you access real players, tons of items of clothing (woohoo!) and exclusive audio tracks from popular beat combos. *CustomPlay Golf*, on the other hand, aims

to bring something a bit more useful to the table: a fully-fledged 18-hole course editor.

We're not talking basic stuff here: this enables you to play landscape designer to your heart's content. Want to plant

American crab apple trees next to the tee or place a selection of rocks to set off a water hazard? The world is yours. You can even whip out your digital camera, rattle off a few snaps and then import the textures into the editor.

It's easy enough to dive straight into, but sufficiently complex to satisfy the most demanding of designers. Sadly, we can't say the same about the actual game: it feels familiar (you click or swing your mouse to hit the ball, natch), but it lacks the smooth accessibility of *Tiger Woods*, and often makes simple shots frustratingly difficult to pull off.

If you've a hankering to make your own intricately detailed golfing playgrounds, this is worth a shot. If you just want to hit a few balls, go for *Woods*.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

75

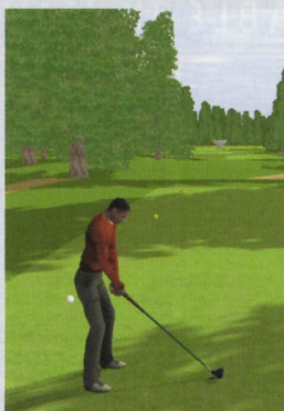
Just above par



A random hole generator is included.



Design a hole and email a demo to your mates.



Nice tight pants fella.



Want to leave your rivals in the shade? Plant more trees.

CT SPECIAL FORCES: FIRE FOR EFFECT

■ Price: £19.99 | Pub: Hip Games | Dev: Asobo Studio | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES: P3 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES: P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Sam Kiildsen joins the war on terrible game titles



"And your specialist subject?"



There's plenty of cover to duck behind.



Raptor takes vengeance on the film critics.

DEVELOPED for the PC and consoles simultaneously, *Counter Terrorist Special Forces* isn't the stealthy squad-based anti-terror game its moniker suggests. While there are a few covert elements thrown in, this is essentially a brainless third-person shooter that sees you blasting your way through hundreds of baddies in the name of freedom.

It's simplistic stuff, true – and it feels very much like a console game to play – but it's blessed with an undeniable fun factor that keeps you interested far longer than you initially suspect. This is partly down to the ragdoll physics (after all, who doesn't enjoy seeing a terrorist cartwheel over a railing?), and partly due to the slight variations in the gameplay style. Some levels mix in a touch of vehicle action to break up the foot-based carnage, while others feature short skydiving segments. We also like

the way you can duck behind cover, either popping out to spray off a few rounds or firing blind round the corner.

Your two ops (the burly, Arnie-esque Raptor and sneaky Stealth Owl) have access to an interesting arsenal of war gear. There are guns aplenty, naturally, but also some neat gadgets like electromagnetic grenades and a *Predator*-style camouflage suit.

If you'll permit us to pull on our negative hat for a moment, we feel we have to mention the blurry, outdated graphics (another console hangover), C-grade voice-acting and the rather linear layout of the levels. Overall though – and bearing in mind the sub-20 quid price tag – this is an enjoyable romp that will while away a few hours.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**
Dumb fun

68

OMAR SHARIF 3D BRIDGE

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: Softkey | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES: PIII 800 MHz, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES: It's a Bridge game. It's not going to break your machine in two

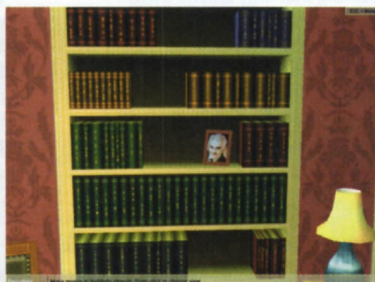
Will Porter has more than one ace up his sleeve

ONE OF the many nuggets of arcane knowledge you get from going to posh school, alongside dodging bricks thrown at you on the street and how to kick peasants, is a basic knowledge in a game with stupid rules. (And bum love, obviously.) For Wills and Harry it's that Eton Wall game, for Harry Potter it's Quidditch and for me it's Bridge.

Having played two previous incarnations of the works of Omar Sharif (once heart-throb film star now granny-moistening bridge game designer), you can imagine my surprise and delight to discover that the game had hit the third dimension. You play in a room! A room you can walk around! A room with a window you can look out of! And pictures of Omar Sharif! And a 3D record player you can play MP3s on!



Play bridge with a selection of sinister-looking people, gaze at Omar and then look out the window...



Shit-a-brick if we're not in the god-damned future...

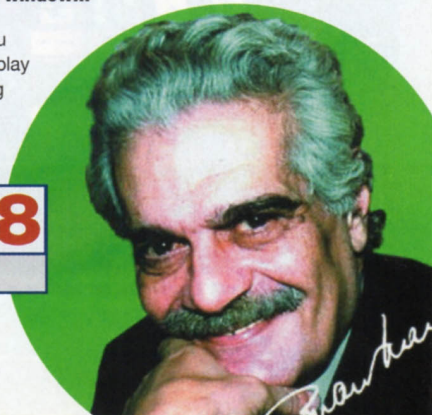
So it looks rubbish. But it does the Bridge bit well: opponents aren't all-powerful and the various bits and bobs that can vary in the international game are as tweakable as even the most hard-mouthed of old women would want them. For the ten-year-olds in the audience

there are even unlockable decks of cards. Big woo. Having played *TellTale Texas Hold 'Em*, the card-sim with some marvellous inter-character dialogue, we know what's missing. Where's the 3D Omar Sharif we can banter with about *Doctor Zhivago*, while doubling a three club trump bid? Nowhere. Not even a 3D self-twirling moustache. The tutorial

is pretty crap as well – if you really want to learn how to play then I recommend boarding school or borstal. Then again, it is cheap. Your auntie might like it.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**
Does the job

58



IndieZone

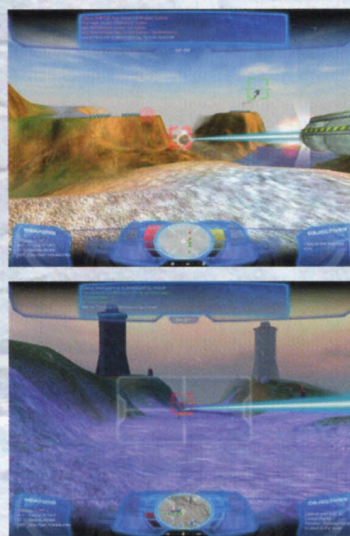
You can find demo versions of all these games on the CD & DVD. Try 'em then buy 'em...



Put your PC and your brain into action and it's amazing what you can come up with. That's what these indie developers did – **Anthony Holden** presents the fruits of their labours...

DARK HORIZONS: LORE – INVASION

■ \$29.95 (£16) | Dev: Max Gaming Technologies | www.darkhorizons-lore.com



MAVs come in scout, infantry, assault and tank configurations, while special abilities such as cloaking are handy for hit-and-run attacks.

BOASTING A BUDGET, scope and ambition to make most indies weep, *Dark Horizons: Lore – Invasion* is a remarkable undertaking. It's an FPS for a start – something that normally spells indie suicide (see *Deadhunt*, opposite) – but it's also a team-based, persistent, online mech-based FPS. The gameplay sits somewhere between *Tribes* and

MechWarrior, with two teams of heavy-duty mechs (or MAVs) bounding and jetpacking their way around some sizeable outdoor arenas. Individual matches are short and varied, taking in traditional modes such as King Of The Hill, CTF, DM and Assault. Beyond this however, there's a dose of *PlanetSide* in the mix, as each smaller match forms

part of a greater and continuous battle for the North American continent, circa 2160.

It's no match for the big commercial players like *Tribes: Vengeance*, having under-par graphics and sound, thick AI and scary loading times. Yet despite all this, it still plays a surprisingly decent game of robots, with a B-grade charm that shines through the smudgy visuals.

It's still quite hard to find a populated server outside of a Friday evening, and admittedly, we're awarding it Indie Game Of The Month partly based on potential. But if *DHLI* continues to grow, the promise is there for an enjoyable and out-of-the-ordinary indie shooter.

PCZONE VERDICT

70



Cards are dealt randomly, so luck is a big factor.

ASTRAL MASTERS

■ \$19.95 (£10.60) | Dev: Apus Software | www.astralmasters.com

ONCE A NOVELTY for the Pokémon set, collectible card games now appear to be a proper gaming genre. There's even an acronym – CCGs – which surely makes it official. With such simple turn-based combat at their core, it was only a matter of time until the indies got involved – and so we have *Astral Masters*, sequel to the largely unknown *Astral Tournament*.

Following closely in the footsteps of *Magic: The Gathering*, *Astral Masters* is a fantasy-themed affair in which two duellists take turns to deploy a variety of spell- and monster-based cards in an attempt to reduce the other's life to zero. It's a proven concept, as addictive and

enjoyable here as in any of the more bankable franchises, though the presentation obviously falls well behind the likes of a *Yu-Gi-Oh!*

Nonetheless, *Astral Masters* is a solid and well-balanced effort. The tactics may be flimsy, but there's a good deal of pleasure to be had in playing a good hand of cards and building up an ever more powerful deck.

Unfortunately, two-player is hotseat only at present, though online and LAN-play are promised in the next update. Until then, the demo is surprisingly comprehensive.

PCZONE VERDICT

68

DEADHUNT

■ \$19.95 (£10.60) | Dev: REL Games | www.deadhunt.com

THE FIRST-PERSON

shooter started its life in shareware, and so it returns with this zombie-themed effort called *Deadhunt*. Unfortunately, the intervening decade seems to have been for naught, as this is one of the most laughably primitive 3D shooters ever. You expect an indie-coded FPS to be a bit rough around the edges, but this is awful.

For starters, the maps are simply wide-open arenas with the odd rock or tree.

The gameplay, such as it is, involves backpedalling furiously away from a mounting tide of undead warriors and occasionally picking up a power rune, then circling around and around the map until they're all dead. It's tedious, depressing and utterly without merit, and the sort of thing that gives indie gaming a bad name.

PCZONE VERDICT

5



Five points because the zombie's head's come off.



Games typically last between 10-15 minutes, if that.

TRIBAL TROUBLE

■ \$24.95 (£13.20) | Dev: Oddlabs | www.oddlabs.com

TRIBAL TROUBLE is based on the idea (not a new one by any means) of stripping back the RTS to its essential elements and delivering a pure, lightning-fast multiplayer game with the least possible amount of fuss. It's a deliberately lightweight affair – bright, brisk and easy to play – but with the potential for some not wholly unexciting online action.

Choosing between Vikings and Natives, the basic aim is to build a large army as quickly as possible and overwhelm the enemy with weight of numbers. You've got three types of



building, five types of unit and a handful of resources at your disposal, though for the sake of simplicity the interface is mostly limited to assigning numbers to a given task. Unfortunately, this also leads to a fair amount of confusion, and it can be exceedingly hard to select units in the middle of a fight.

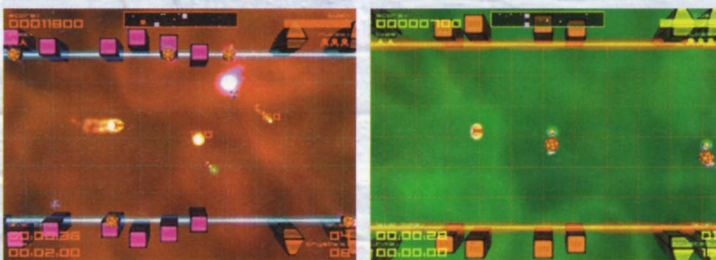
Ultimately, it's a frantic but fairly shallow experience, and perhaps not quite as enjoyable as the conceptually similar *Gate 88* featured in last month's Freeplay. And that game costs no money.

PCZONE VERDICT

62

ALIEN ABDUCTION

■ £9.99 | Dev: Pumpkin Games | www.pumpkin-games.net



If anything, it's even more rock-hard than the original.

WE'VE DISCUSSED the issue of plagiarism in indie games before, but I'm afraid the issue is set to get another workout with the release of *Alien Abduction*. In this case, however, the line is slightly more blurred than usual. In the past, we've taken issue with shareware developers who remake older games and try to pass them off as new. However, *Alien Abduction* openly bills itself as a tribute to *Defender*, with graphics inspired by *Mutant Storm*.

Case dismissed and we can all pack up and go home

you'd think – but the problem is it's a very accurate tribute, right down to the radar scanner, the smart bombs and the waves of alien attackers. There are a few small tweaks, including power-ups and strange new alien types, but not enough to make it a completely new game.

Saying that, it's a gorgeous job, giving the game a lovely abstract makeover and a very different feel, and as such we're going to let it off. Just be warned: the gameplay here is some 24 years old.

PCZONE VERDICT

69

REPLAY

Welcome to **Sam Kieldsen's** bargain basement. Everything must go...

CONFLICT: VIETNAM

■ £9.99 | Pub: Mastertronic | ETA: July

ONE OF THE glut of Vietnam-based titles that's popped up over the last couple of years, *Conflict: Vietnam* maintains the squad-based third-person shooter style of its predecessors *Conflict: Desert Storm* and *Conflict: Desert Storm II*. The game's gameplay style remains similar, only now you're toting an M16, sporting a green bandana and running through the

jungle instead of kicking up dust in the Middle East.

Taking command of your four-man team is a breeze, thanks to the clever yet simple control system, and the Vietcong enemy present a hefty challenge. But it ain't all gravy. The aiming controls are floaty and frustrating (possibly down to the game being developed for consoles first), and the levels frequently force you down annoyingly narrow corridors, even when you're out wandering the rainforest. The omission of a jump key doesn't help either –

you can't even clamber over a fallen tree trunk.

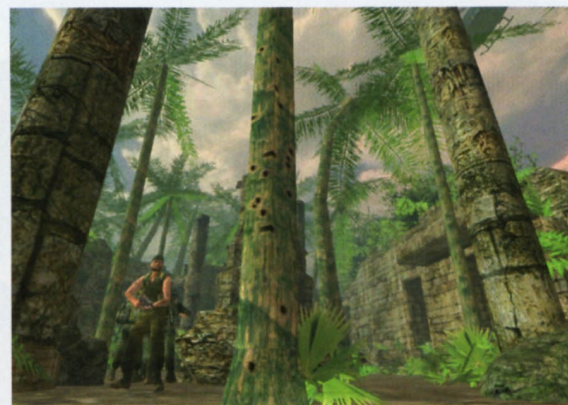
Even more astounding is the lack of a multiplayer mode. A squad-centric title like this is simply crying out for some online co-operative action, but the developer has stubbornly stuck to its single-player guns, thereby missing an obvious trick.

Unless you're a fan of the previous games, or a Vietnam obsessive, we see little reason to shell out a tenner for another tour of duty.

PCZONE VERDICT 58



"HQ – we need to evacuate from this average game asap!"



Those are either big trees or very small soldiers.



Not the Bitmap Brothers' finest hour.



Lights, camera, action!

WORLD WAR II: FRONTLINE COMMAND

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: Out Now

DESPITE a rather half-hearted attempt to elevate itself above the standard RTS dross (its much vaunted but ultimately rubbish morale system), *Frontline Command* manages to fall neatly into this dull, dreary category of game.

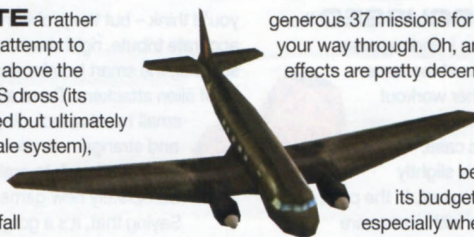
For a start, the dismal, lifeless visuals and woeful interface do little to help the cause. In fact, all the game has going for it is the fact that the developer (the once great Bitmap Brothers) has tossed in a

generous 37 missions for you to work your way through. Oh, and the sound effects are pretty decent too.

All in all, this disappointing game doesn't benefit much from

its budget re-launch, especially when the truly excellent *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II* is currently on sale for a piddling three quid more. Do yourself a favour, yomp into your nearest store and grab that instead.

PCZONE VERDICT 38



NO MAN'S LAND

■ £4.99 | Pub: Xplosive | ETA: Out Now

THIS IS NOT, as its name suggests, a World War I game, but rather a traditional RTS that concerns itself with the main events in the founding of America. So we've got Redcoats, Spaniards, Native Americans and all the rest getting down and dirty in pursuit of land, independence and riches beyond measure.

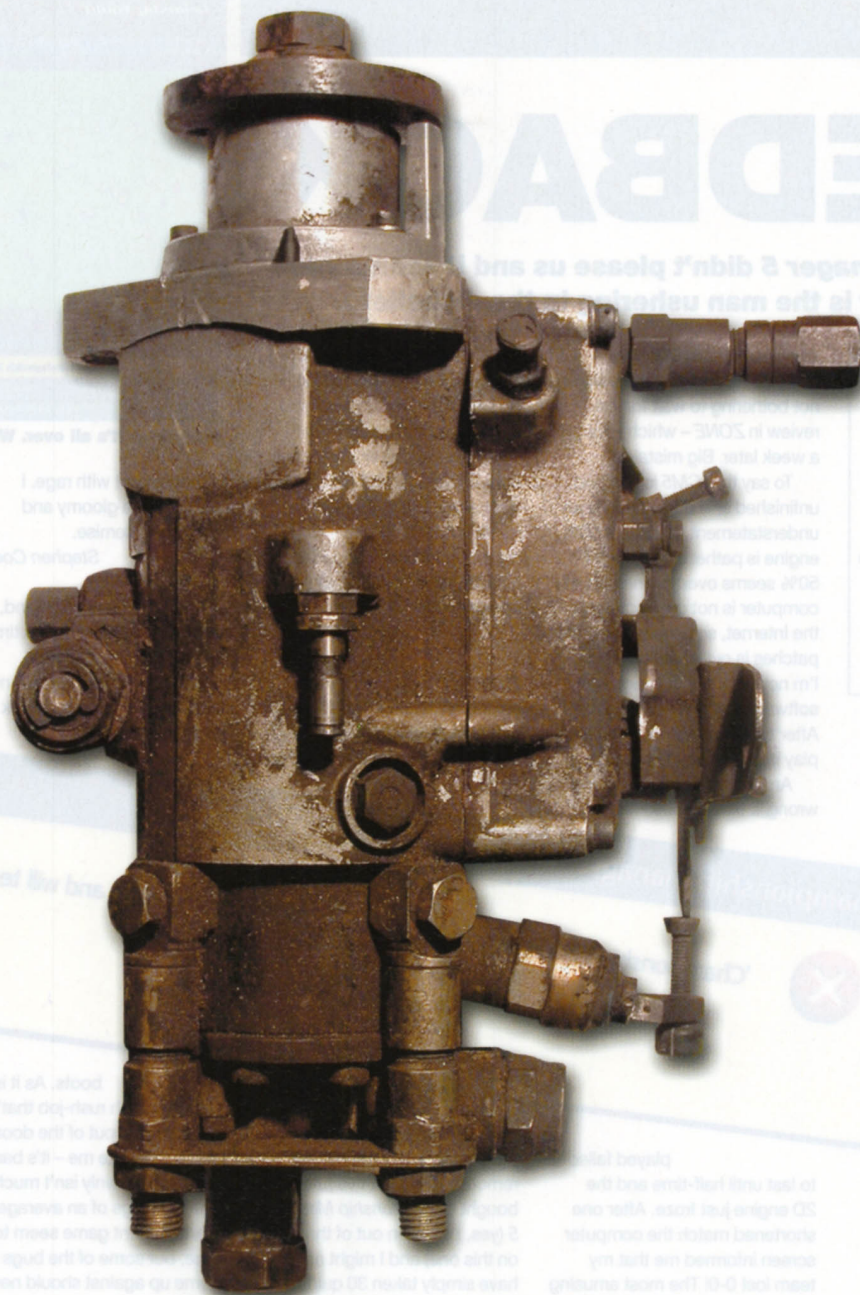
If you've played an RTS game during the last nine years, then it's unlikely that *No Man's Land* will show you anything

approaching an original feature (although we did spy an 'Execute chastity belt' command in the controls menu, which is admittedly rather intriguing). The gameplay is by-the-numbers RTS fare in the vein of *Age Of Empires* or the original *Cossacks*, and there's little here to hold your interest. One for rabid RTS completists only.

PCZONE VERDICT 41



It's as exciting as it looks.



The Devil is in the details

FEEDBACK

Championship Manager 5 didn't please us and it seems you concur. Will Porter is the man ushering in the disbelief...

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed in recent issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. To get your views in print, all you have to do is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than **100 words**. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5

REVIEWED ISSUE 154 (BY STEVE HILL), SCORE: 50%

What we thought

It was never going to match *Football Manager 2005*, but the signs are that it could at least have been competent. If Beautiful Game Studios remains in existence, no doubt patches will continue to appear thick and fast, but unfortunately you can't polish a turd. Eidos, you have dropped the ball.

What you said

I'm a football management enthusiast and regularly play *Champ Man 03/04* and the excellent *Football Manager 2005*. So I was really pleased to

see *Champ Man 5* on the shelves. I grabbed it immediately, not bothering to wait for the review in *ZONE* – which I bought a week later. Big mistake.

To say that *CM5* is crippled, unfinished and bug-ridden is an understatement, and the match engine is pathetic. A score of 50% seems overly generous. My computer is not connected to the Internet, so downloading any patches is out of the question. I'm now stuck with a piece of software that just doesn't work. After two evenings of trying to play it, I've conceded defeat.

An example of what can go wrong is that all matches

informed that four of my players were injured with dislocated fingers. Was this the result of shaking hands too firmly with the opposition when the match ended prematurely? Eidos claims that this is the world's number one football management game – evidently, it hasn't heard of *Football Manager 2005*.

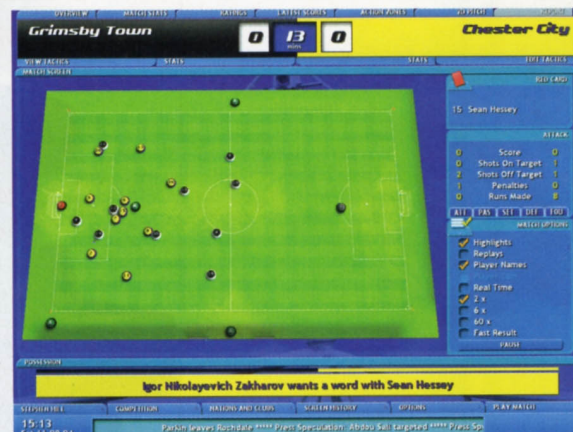
RA Elliott

That's it, I'm giving up and buying an Xbox. At least on that machine developers have to actually finish their damn games

Championship Manager 5 - ERROR
'Championship Manager 5' has performed an illegal operation and will terminate.

played failed to last until half-time and the 2D engine just froze. After one shortened match the computer screen informed me that my team lost 0-0! The most amusing occurrence was that after one match had stopped, I was

and not rely on endless patches to make them even remotely playable. I've just bought *Championship Manager 5* (yes, I've been out of the loop on this one) and I might as well have simply taken 30 quid from my wallet and fed it to my dog. I make light of it, but I'm



They think it's all over. With CM5, it is now.

incandescent with rage. I wish Eidos a gloomy and prolonged demise.

Stephen Coombs

With an ounce of effort and, god help it, even enough time given to its development, *Championship Manager 5* might have been fit enough to lick *Football Manager's*

Seriously, I think 40 per cent is a more accurate score. Personally, I'll just stick to *FM2005*.

AssassiN

To think that it has come to this. Over the past few years I must have plunged more than 100 quid into Eidos for *Champ Man*, and now it takes my good faith (and even more of my good money) and does little more than piss in my face. I bought *CM5* more out of habit than anything else: thank god I jumped ship to *Football Manager* when I did.

Ian Jarrett

Hill's comment

First, Mr Elliott, what the hell were you

thinking of buying a game before reading the definitive *PC ZONE* review? This is precisely the reason why Eidos cynically withheld review code until the game was safely on the shelves. If a game is on sale before the reviews come out, the chances are that it's an unmitigated pile of shite. I'm guessing that you've learnt your lesson.

As for downloading patches, don't worry about it – we reviewed the patched version and it was still, in the parlance, bugged to f**k. AssassiN and co – thank you for pointing out the accuracy of my nail-hitting.

As for the 'generous' score, a few people have said that, including an employee of Eidos. As I said in the review, if it had been released without the bugs, it'd be a decent game. As it is, it's an absolute disgrace and the 50 per cent score reflects that. [X]

boots. As it is –

some rubbish rush-job that's been thrown out of the door to con people like me – it's barely a game. It certainly isn't much fun. The workings of an average management game seem to be here, but some of the bugs I've come up against should never have found their way into a commercial release. And certainly not a commercial release that bears the hallowed *Champ Man* tag.

Jim Owen

Well done Eidos. That's right, it's only gone and proven most people right by making *Championship Manager* rubbish. This game has it all: players going missing, wins being recorded as losses and random crashes (and that's when it's patched)! If you love bugged-to-hell games, then *Championship Manager 5* is the one for you – Steve Hill hit the nail on the head with his review content, but the score was overly generous.

"I might as well have taken £30 from my wallet and fed it to my dog. I wish Eidos a gloomy and prolonged demise"

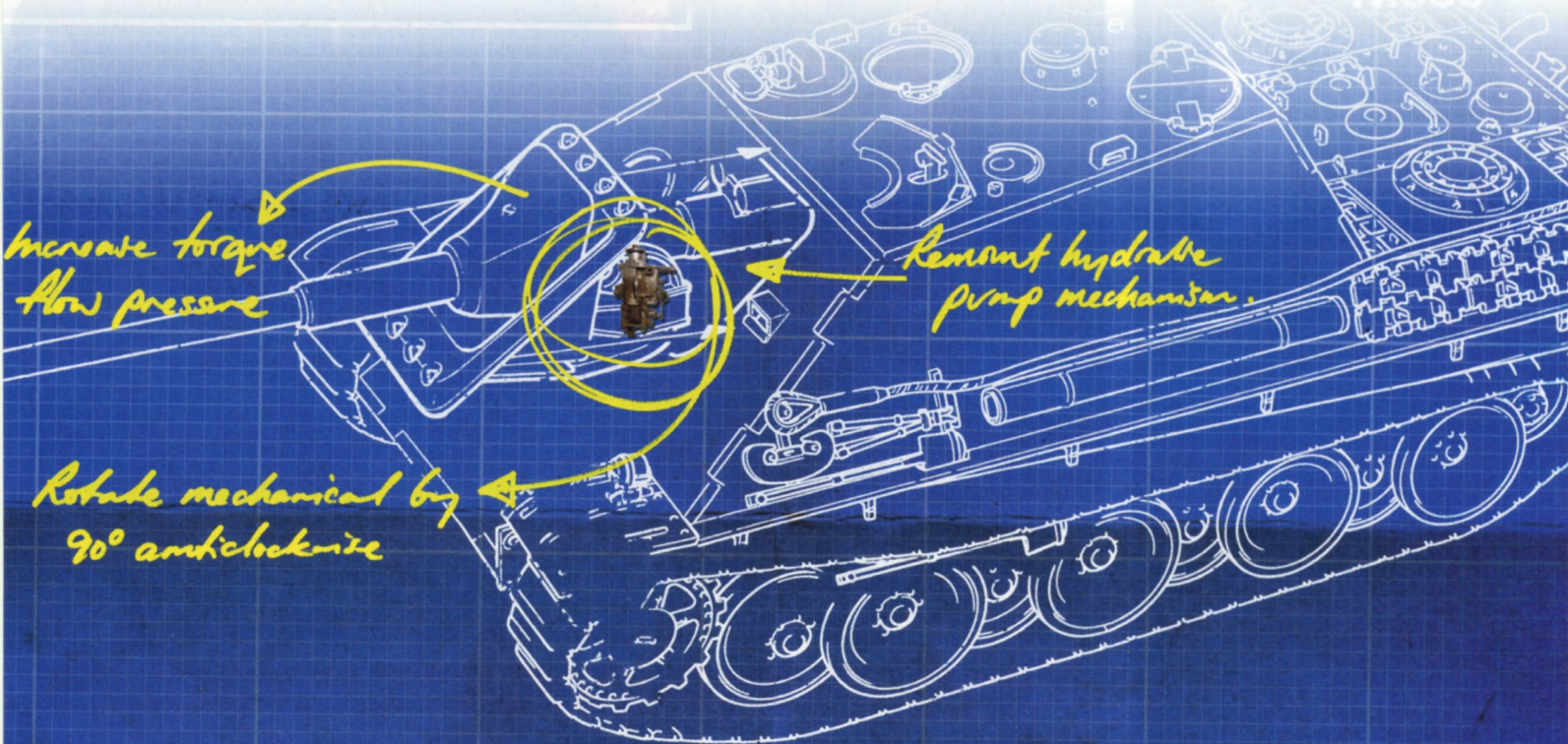
STEPHEN COOMBS DOESN'T MINCE HIS WORDS



Rubbish team, rubbish game. Sorry Steve.

CODENAME: PANZERS PHASE TWO

MAKE IT
THUO



CATIONS

kg

Width:	3.28m (w/o aprons) 3.42m (with aprons)
Height:	2.51m
Armament:	88mm Pak 43/3 U71 & 1 x MG34 7.92mm (1 x MG34 7.92mm)

Penetration of Arm. Plate at 30 degrees from Vertical:	
Ammunition:	100m 500m 1000m 1500m 2000m
Panzergrate:	203mm 185mm 165mm 145mm 127mm

JAGDPANZER

We covered the details -
you go give 'em Hell



The ultimate in WWII gaming is here. Devilishly detailed graphics, ultra-realistic combat scenarios and superbly intuitive game play. Stop reading. There's a war to win.



PC CD-ROM



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YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

MAKE IT COUNT



■ **ONLINE EDITOR** Paul Presley

▲ We're nothing if not crusading. Following our recent review of the world of *Neocron 2*, it would seem that we sparked something of a mass debate amongst the devotees of the game over on the official *Neocron* forums.

Unlike the usual collection of hatred, vitriol and death threats that normally accompany a bad review of someone's favourite game, this particular debate had the unprecedented effect of actually agreeing with the majority of the review's points.

The call has now gone up for Reakktor.com (the developer) to finally pay heed, not only to our, but also to most of the other negative reviews *Neocron 2* has received, and do something about it. Something like, you know, making the game better and that. Score one for the good guys.

Reakktor.com could do far worse than look at this month's two main titles – *Guild Wars* and *World Of Warcraft*. Both games not only hit the ground running at launch, they set about breaking all known land speed records in the process. The former (reviewed on page 108) is one of the most insanely addictive and playable online games we've seen since, well, the latter. Original concepts, beautifully realised gameplay mechanics... No wonder it went straight in at number one in the charts (pushing *WOW* down to a still credible fourth, incidentally).

Of course, there's fight in Blizzard yet (despite a fair old chunk of its workforce recently leaving for reasons probably entirely unrelated to NCsoft's opening of a new studio just down the road). The *Battlegrounds* PvP update (page 102) should bolster things and repair the damage done by the recent 'honor system' update. That's the hope, anyway.



Phantasy Star Universe mixes on and offline gaming.



A PC PHANTASY

CLASSIC PSO SERIES MAKES PC DEBUT, PAVING THE WAY FOR PSU

BACK IN THE good old days, when men were men, women were in the kitchen, and games made by Sega were filled with joy and wonder, there existed a little title called *Phantasy Star Online* on the Dreamcast console. An online sci-fi world long before MMOs came to be the fabulously efficient beasts they are today, it was the future of gaming and it was on your telly. At least it was until the fabled games platform went tits-up and became superseded by the Xbox.

Regardless, the *PSO* saga continued in one form or another (even becoming a *Pokémon*-style collectable card game at one stage), and now it lives again in what some would say is its natural home, thanks to *Phantasy Star Online – Blue Burst*, arriving on the PC this June. Combining all previous *PSOs* (including turning the story for the CCG into traditional MMO style) into one giant game, it brings the complete *PSO* experience to PC users for the first time.

Meanwhile, *Phantasy Star Universe* has been slated for a spring 2006 release and begins a whole new chapter in the ongoing saga – splitting duties equally between offline single-player and online multiplayer role-playing action with more traditional ongoing development associated with MMOs.

The single-player game focuses on one Ethan Waber, a young cadet intent on saving his sister from the mysterious SEED forces. Online, you get to create your own hero and explore three complete planets, drive vehicles and create whole new phantasies for yourself. Ho ho.



The classic *Phantasy Star Online* saga finally comes to PC.



■ **Developer/Publisher:** Sega
 ■ **ETA:** June 2005
 ■ **Website:** www.psoblueburst.com

**102****WOW: BATTLEGROUNDS**
The latest on the PvP expansion**108****GUILD WARS**
Sheer class in a game**112****THE SAGA OF RYZOM**
Has life improved on Atys?**119****NEVERQUEST**
Jacking off with Steve Hill

AO GETS LOST

NEW EXPANSION FOR SCI-FI CLASSIC BRINGS PVP TO THE FORE**Orbital strikes are go.**

HAVING BEEN subjected to an alien invasion for almost a year now, the citizens of *Anarchy Online*'s sci-fi world, Rubi-ka, are finally being given the chance to hit back and reclaim their home once more.

Lost Eden is the latest expansion pack for the long-running science-fiction MMO to be announced, with a strong emphasis on the PvP nature of the game's two warring factions.

In a nod to *PlanetSide*, players get to deploy battle Mechs in combat, calling in air strikes, artillery fire and mine-laying tools in the heat of battle. The PvP action also switches to the orbiting battle stations, where both sides of the conflict vie for ultimate power over the planet. There are also new 'dungeon' areas in the heart of the alien motherships to explore, hiding all manner of new weapons, items and armour.

**Not exactly paradise.**

Game director Morten Byom spent several months examining the current state of *AO*, and felt that the game's PvP systems "deserved a makeover to take it to a whole new level." He stated recently that the list of what new features needed to be included quickly grew so long, that the only viable way to include everything was in the form of a whole new expansion pack.

No doubt a reaction to the recent shifts in PvP emphasis in everything from *City Of Heroes* to *Guild Wars*, this news does at least continue to keep *AO* – four years old this June – a competitive product in the market, certainly for the immediate future. *Lost Eden* is set to go live this winter.

■ **Developer/Publisher:** Funcom
■ **ETA:** Winter 2005
■ **Website:** www.anarchy-online.com



THE A-Z OF MMOs

ONLINE GAMING EXPLAINED

E is for **Experience Points** (or XP as they're more commonly known – we just couldn't wait till X to tell you this).

Seemingly the one constant in every MMO, experience points are the single most valuable attribute in any game, measuring exactly how much damage your Warrior of Zek can do when twatting fiends and foes in the eyes with a sword.

Experience works roughly like this. Take a long stick-like object, a baseball bat perhaps, or maybe a toy lightsaber. Even a mop handle will do so long as you remove the sissy part first. Head out into your back garden (or for those of you not living in posh country houses, any old scrap of land not currently occupied by toughs and ne'er-do-wells). Start swinging the stick around, occasionally hitting small defenceless insects. Don't worry if anyone questions your actions, just explain that it's all in the name of science and you have our permission. They'll be impressed with your commitment to academia.

Keep hitting worms, flies, the occasional stray cat until you hear a loud 'ping'. This will mean you've amassed enough experience points to go up a level, and also means your repetitive fly-swatting has now made you better at running, jumping, picking locks, casting fireballs, taking damage from bigger cats with sharper claws and, of course, stick swinging. Don't argue the logic, this is the basic template for every MMO in existence – and since they're the ones making all the money and we're the ones paying them, there must be something in it.

WIN!

GUILD WARS

FIVE COPIES OF THE ACTION-PACKED MMO TO BE WON

WHAT'S THE biggest problem most MMO players have to face? Hordes of rampaging goblins? Running short on health potions? Not finding enough raw materials to supply your crafting needs? Nope, sadly, the most prevalent issue facing virtual addicts is the monthly real-world subscription fee needed to carry on playing.

Luckily, one game has decided to do away with all that. *Guild Wars* is the latest action blockbuster from the good folk at NCsoft, and aside from providing top-notch PvP *Unreal Tournament* meets *World Of Warcraft*-style action, it also eschews the need for continual financing – charging you just once for the boxed copy and not a regular fee.

To celebrate such generosity, we've gotten hold of five copies of the game to give away, meaning you may not even need to pay that initial fee either! To be in with a chance of winning, just answer the following question:

Which of the following is not a character type in *Guild Wars*?

A: Mesmer B: Ranger C: Sanitiser

Send your answer before Wednesday June 22 on the back of a postcard or envelope to: *Guild Wars* Competition, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. For full competition terms and conditions, see page 7.



CLAN DIARY

#TRUTH

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy

The *Counter-Strike* community is besieged with exams, though some have still managed to find the time for the Cyberathlete Professional League. This year's CPL World Tour, visiting ten countries, recently stopped in Barcelona. Interestingly, there was a \$10,000 *Counter-Strike* 1.6 tournament for women run alongside the one for men, unlike in other stops of the world tour. Sixteen teams were invited from all over Europe, and while #Truth were unable to attend, a few of our members filled in for other European teams. Purpletiger, also known as Laura, went with Spanish team x6tence.AMD. Thankfully, most European teams can speak English, so it's not too difficult for English girls to integrate with foreign teams.

The competition was tough, and x6tence managed a 9-12th placing at the event, with ESWC champions EIBO[5] from China placing first. It was a hard event for all involved – female matches were delayed in order to get the other games in, resulting in some matches being played as late as 5am. Despite this, the teams produced some exciting games to watch, displaying just how far female gaming has come in the last year.

In continental Europe, the media and the public have taken a huge interest in female gamers, boosting the popularity of gaming as a whole. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for over here. We thank those who do take an interest – the faithful sponsors and supporters who keep pushing for female gaming to grow – but what is really needed is for more girls to actually play games, and not just talk about them!

Still, the number of girls playing games in the UK is growing, just not at the same rate as our European counterparts. As always, #Truth are on the lookout for new talent for the post-exam period – let's make a fresh start and tackle those summer leagues!

We've partnered up with #e-FRAG UK servers, to give us the stable, low-ping base that we need to really keep our hand in. Further helping the community, e-FRAG is offering a ten per cent discount on all game servers – just quote 'PCZ' on the order form at www.e-frag.co.uk. Check them out, and hopefully we'll see you guys at a LAN event or online in the near future. And in the meantime – keep gaming!



Purpletiger keeps the British end up in Spain.

"The number of girls playing games in the UK is growing, but not as fast as in Europe"

CITY OF HEROES

STATZONE SPECIAL

ALL THE SUPER-POWERED STATS A NUMERICAL HERO COULD USE

For the past year, the world of Paragon City has seen more heroes, do-gooders and tight-wearing Boy Scouts upholding the forces of law and order, taking *City Of Heroes* to heights of MMO success not seen since the original *EverQuest* set the benchmark half a decade ago.

To illustrate this, NCsoft has issued a raft of surprising facts, figures and statistics, depicting the cape-strewn online universe in a way that's never been seen before...



CREATED SUPER-GROUPS

There are twice as many super-groups in Paragon City as there are troupes of Boy Scouts in America.



PLAYER HOURS

Since it began, more than 80 million hours of playing time have been clocked up by the inhabitants of *City Of Heroes*. If this were a single-player game, it would take one person 9,000 years to notch up the same amount of game time.

HERO ORIGINS

Over ten million characters have been created since *City Of Heroes* opened its doors. Of those:

27% – mutant origins

24% – magical origins

18% – natural origins

16% – scientific origins

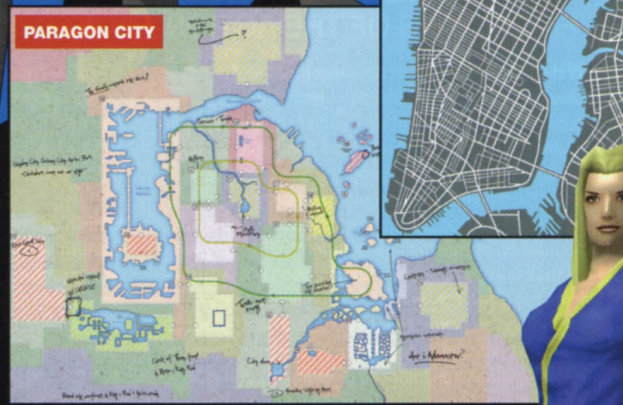
15% – technological origins

RELATIVE CITY POPULATIONS



LAND SIZES

Paragon City is approximately 23 square miles, equivalent in size to Manhattan.

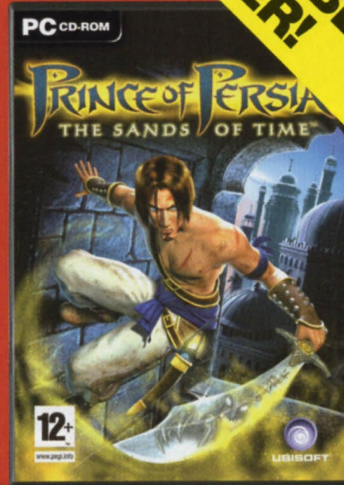
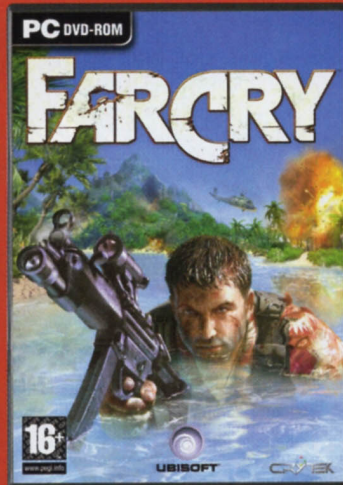
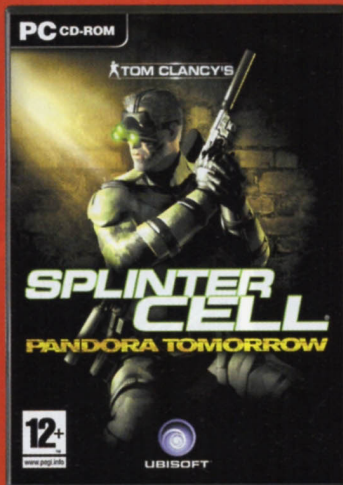


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Mining colonies enable you to gather precious raw materials.

Mirror, mirror...

FACE OF MANKIND

Rhianna Pratchett is very glad that black leather has made it to the 24th century

ONE OF the more consistent gripes that we come across when interviewing independent MMOG developers is that current online worlds are too focused on just creating pretty sandboxes. Players are dazzled by beautiful graphics and seamless gameplay, but ultimately you're on a ride through a theme park of someone else's creation. You buy a monthly ticket, you know what you're

getting and your individual impact on the world itself is approximately zilch.

Undoubtedly, there are a lot of players who like it that way, especially in the wake of *World Of Warcraft*, but there's certainly a market for attracting others who want to be in charge of their world as much as the world is in charge of them. *The Saga Of Ryzom* went a little way down this route, with some success. Now enter *Face Of Mankind* from Frankfurt-based Duplex Systems. *FOM* takes place in Earth's 24th century, when population surges and intergalactic colonisation have left the world divided into various factions and organisations who continually vie for economic and military control.

Unlike in most online role-playing games, Duplex claims that you'll have a unique role in shaping the *Face Of Mankind* world. Part of this is down to the unprecedented levels of player-centric

activity within the ten factions in the game (see 'Top Ten', right). All the items in *FOM* are player-made, meaning that you'll have a very direct influence over your economy. Many of the missions, campaigns and agendas will be created by you too, which impacts heavily on the way the world works.

"True player involvement is really missing in current MMOGs," claims

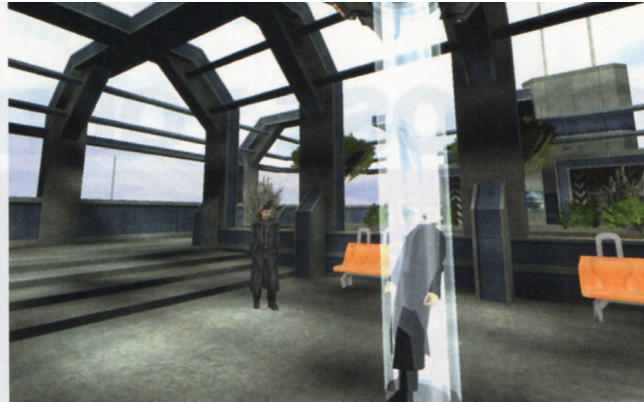
missions: you often have the option to create small missions like assassinations, but they don't have a true influence on the game."

The mission system certainly looks like being one of the key features of *Face Of Mankind* – if you're prepared to put the work in that is, especially at the higher levels. Dieckmann goes on to explain

"This has a very steep learning curve, especially when compared to *WOW*"

Marko Dieckmann, MD of Duplex Systems. "The current standard involves players taking part in all kinds of pre-created content, and the option for them to create their own content is rather limited. Even with item creation, the items you create aren't really important for the game's economics. It's the same with

that the mission system will consist of agendas, campaigns and missions. An agenda is a basic guideline for the faction, created by the faction leader. Campaigns, meanwhile, are complex mission pools that can be created by the highest-ranking players for the good of their faction. Plans are to create numerous



Beaming into uptown Manhattan.



The Krypton Factor had gone super hi-tech.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Duplex Systems

PUBLISHER Duplex Systems

WEBSITE www.fomportal.com

ETA Late 2005

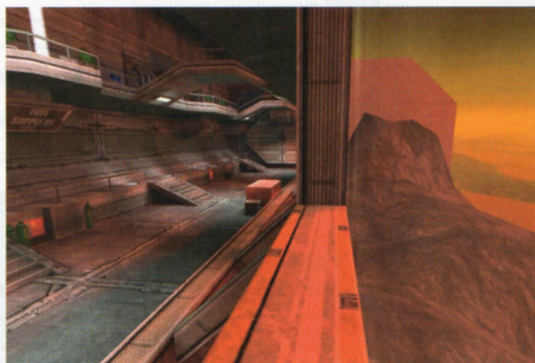
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- MMORPG based in the 24th century
- Heavily story-based
- Player-generated missions
- Strong emphasis on community and co-operation

CV

DUPLEX SYSTEMS

Duplex Systems was founded in January 2001 and is now based in Frankfurt. The goal was to reinvent and rediscover online gaming by predominantly avoiding the sandbox model that's been standard in the MMORPG world for so long. *Face Of Mankind* is the company's first title and after four years in development, the game is currently in open beta testing.



Shades of *Total Recall*?



Shopping for player-created merchandise.



Tryouts for the next-gen Thriller video were in full flow.



There's always someone happy to stab you in the back.

TOP TEN

NOT AN ORC IN SIGHT

The future is a ruthless place and if you're going to survive, you need a few friends to watch your back. There are ten organisations you can join in *Face Of Mankind*, each with their own goals and agendas. The Global Domination is a centralised military organisation which comprises of the Freedom Defence Corp (army), The Law Enforcement Department (police) and the Global Intelligence Service (CIA). These are the guys who attempt to keep the peace, while making sure that they have as much cash as possible at their disposal.

The Multinational Companies (the Colonization and Mining Guild, American Enterprises, Euro Core and the Asian Coalition) are more economically-focused, with strong manufacturing interests. Although they have their own muscle they often like to hire jobs out, especially to members of the Clans. These fellows are the Brotherhood Of The Shadows, The Guardians Of Mankind and The Mercenaries Of The Blood, and operate as independent organisations that revel in use of tactics, secrets and the promise of large amounts of cash.



Law and order or big fists of cash. The choice is yours.



Look at that topiary. A sterling effort.

types of campaigns covering nearly every purpose, such as offensive, defensive or even economic campaigns. Missions can only be created by mid-rank to high-rank players for a specific campaign.

NO 'I' IN TEAM

The factional structure of the game, in which alliances and inter-factional wars are a constant part of the world, means that *Face Of Mankind* is heavily focused on you as a member of a team rather than you as the lone hero. Dieckmann asserts that this is merely a reflection of what we're used to in our everyday lives: "In our

current human society everyone can have a small impact, but you can only really turn things around if you work with others. This is reflected in the game. You're part of a faction and all your actions impact on the survival of your faction. By working as a team, you can cause colony takeover, declaration of wars, allying, market domination and much more!"

It sounds complicated and if the current open beta is anything to go by, then it's certainly gearing up to focus its attentions squarely on the hardcore market. *Face Of Mankind* currently has a pretty steep learning curve, one that's

practically vertical when compared to something like *WOW*. Dieckmann insists that Duplex is working to make the game more user-friendly in its initial stages, which is often a game's most important make-or-break period.

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY

In addition, *Face Of Mankind* definitely has a view towards stealing the sci-fi/cyberpunk crown from the badly-faded *Neocron*. The look of both games is quite similar, each reflecting that 'bright lights of Tokyo meets the backstreets of Milton Keynes' vision of the future.

But, considering that *Neocron* felt like a very bog-standard MMORPG that had seen *Blade Runner* and *The Matrix* too many times, the crown-stealing shouldn't be too hard for *FOM* to achieve. The world feels very well thought out in both design and execution, although how well it manages to communicate its intricacies to newcomers remains to be seen.

There are some genuinely inventive (if somewhat complicated) gameplay mechanics powering *Face Of Mankind*, so if you fancy an online ride where you can get off and start poking about with the animatronics, watch this space. [E]

2005
PART ONE



Blizzard unveils its plans for PvP combat.



On the market for 90 gold, six bedrooms and private garden.

Axes at dawn...

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLEGROUNDS

Exclusive! *Rhianna Pratchett* readies her daggers, pulls on her leather and hunts down the latest on the ultimate *World Of Warcraft* PvP experience

THERE WAS a time on *World Of Warcraft*'s PvP servers, when a meeting between a Horde and an Alliance character didn't result in certain death for one or other of the participants. Maybe there'd be a bit of wave, a flirty little dance, perhaps even some help with hunting down mobs. But an early demise wasn't a certainty.

Since Blizzard introduced its 'honour' system it's been a whole different story. Now players have been given an incentive to kill other similarly-levelled players and certain NPCs (in the form of honour and contribution points). But it's also induced a kind of killing frenzy that's left some areas devoid of NPCs and others rich with lag.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Blizzard Entertainment
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.wow-europe.com
ETA Out now

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- PvP team-based combat
- Unique gameplay feature such as gryphon air strikes
- Finally makes proper use of the 'honour' points system
- New weapon sets and armour

Although the honour system might have been a little ill-timed in its release, the idea behind it was to pave the way for *WOW*'s next big patch update, which is set to include the brand new *Battlegrounds* system. These are basically special areas where groups of Horde and Alliance players can meet and get all their PvP frustrations out, by engaging in things like territorial take-over and Capture The Flag.

THRILL OF THE KILL

It might seem as if *Battlegrounds* is a bit like building a community youth centre so all the tough kids don't loiter about drinking White Lightning and mugging old ladies. In truth, Blizzard does expect it to reduce some of the PvP griefing, mainly because *Battlegrounds* will become the ideal place to gather honour points, all manner of wonderful loot and engage in a completely new approach to the *WOW* gameplay.

Lead producer Shane Dabiri assures us that *Battlegrounds* isn't a response to how the PvP element of the game has been interpreted by players since launch, but instead something Blizzard had planned from the very beginning.

"We always wanted *World Of Warcraft* to have a robust and involving



"Fetch!"

player-versus-player component," he claims. "Unfortunately, as we got close to shipping the game, we realised that we just wouldn't be able to include it for release. *Battlegrounds* wasn't a response to the players' vocal call for PvP content. Rather, we've been working really hard to finish it because we know players are itching to participate in more meaningful PvP conflict."

LIFE AFTER NOOB

Battlegrounds will be aimed at the mid-to-high-level players, so basically once you're done being a newbie and you've got a firm footing in the game you can play a meaningful role in a battle.

Dabiri is keen to point out that the various battlefields won't just be hack-

and-slash fests, but instead will include lots of different elements. You'll be able to take over strategic areas of the maps such as graveyards and towers and use them to your side's advantage.

You'll also be able to trigger specific events, such as a cavalry charge, or summoning the Ice Lord or Keeper of the Grove, by completing quest objectives. For example, to summon a cavalry charge for the Alliance side, you have to gather enough battering rams to create a cavalry unit. Then, when you have enough, you can launch a devastating charge. If you fancy utilising the impressive-looking air strikes, you'll need to first rescue a wing commander imprisoned in one of the enemy's watchtowers. Lower-level players in



CV

BILZARD
ENTERTAINMENT

BLIZZARD
Its back catalogue reads like a greatest hits collection. You know 'em, you love 'em...

1994 *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* – who could have dreamt ten years ago, just what this pixelated war between the orcs and humans would eventually become?

1996 *Diablo*, Blizzard's much copied hack-and-slash, seems to be well and truly on the back burner in the blinding light of *World Of Warcraft*.

2002 *Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos* – this first 3D outing for *Warcraft* provided much of the backdrop for the online world.

2005 *World Of Warcraft* – it came, it conquered, it came again, and now it's hard to remember life before it.

You'd never believe he's an interior designer level 40.

HONOUR IN DEFEAT

PVP THE HARD WAY

Ever since Blizzard introduced the honour points system into the game, the official forums have been buzzing with outcries from anguished PvPers. Many had hoped that the system (which rewards player and NPC killings of a similar level to your own character) would lessen the problems of ganking (gang killing) and newbie killing. Unfortunately, things seem to have been made worse for a wider selection of players, with many finding levelling takes longer (because you spend more time dead), and player killing "just for the sheer hell of it" has become more widespread. Rumours have circulated about the possibility of 'dishonour' points for low-level kills, but even that is fraught with problems, such as low levels deliberately grieving higher ones, for example.

At the end of the day, player-versus-player was never meant to be a completely easy ride and given the necessary incentive, you know you're a bastard at heart. *Battlegrounds* looks like alleviating part of the problem, but with many emigrating to the PvE servers, Blizzard is going to have to address this issue head-on before the PvP servers suffer anymore.



PvP – cruel entertainment.



"If your name's not down, you're not coming in."



"Players are itching to participate in more meaningful PvP conflict"

SHANE DABIRI LEAD PRODUCER

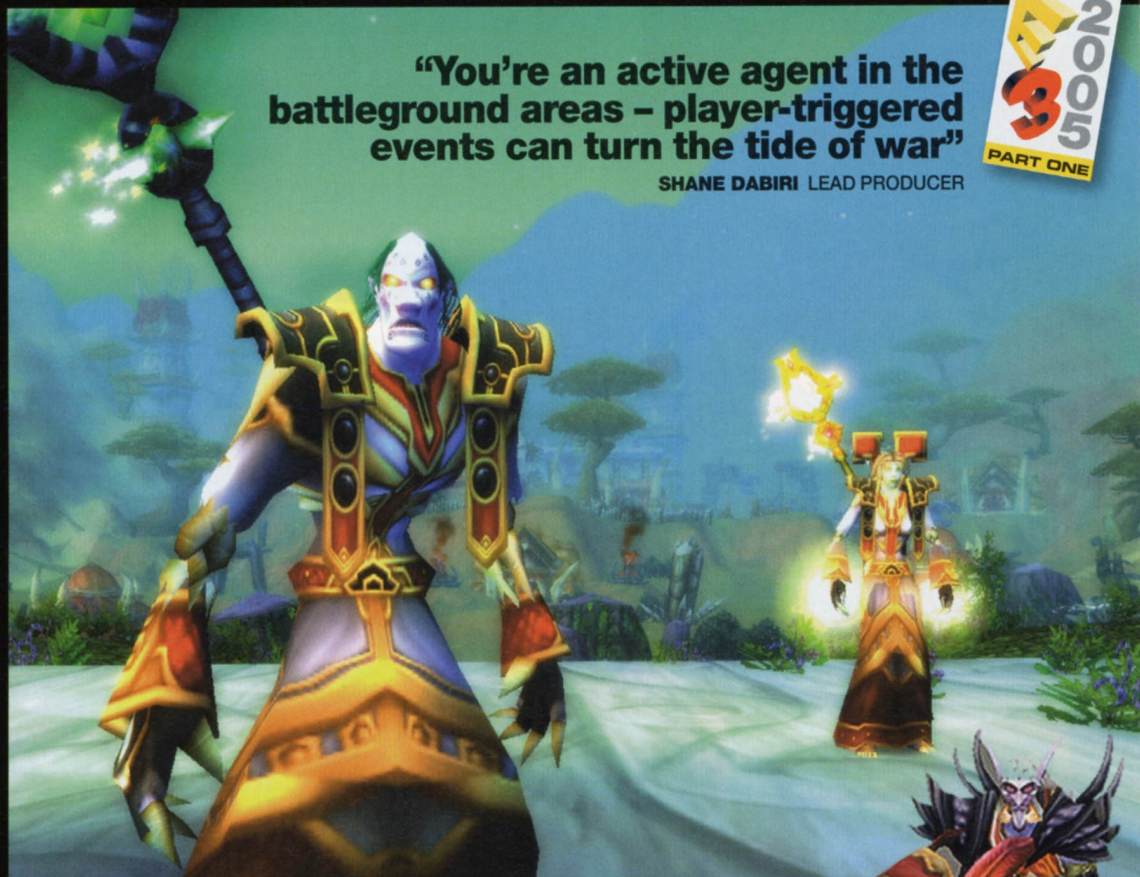
particular will be able to play a vital role in helping fulfil resource-gathering quests, to help bolster their higher-level comrades on the front line.

"We worked hard to ensure that you're an active agent in battleground areas," explains Dabiri. "The NPCs and special events exist for players to activate. They aren't timed events that players have to wait around for. These are player-triggered events that can turn the tide of war, so it falls to the players to activate them."

HIGH AND MIGHTY

The first two areas to be implemented into *WOW* will be Alterac Valley, a large high-level zone that will support 40 players per side, and Warsong Gulch (see 'Song And Dance', below). Alterac, in particular, looks likely to become a popular destination for high-level players as it's full of contested areas, quests and the new *Battlegrounds* loot. It also revolves around a conquer-the-territory objective, which opens up a whole new section of gameplay.

Most importantly, considering *WOW*'s 'casual gamer' approach, is that the battleground areas will be very easy to get to and will work in the same way as instances. When you enter one you'll see a 'Battlegrounds' selection window appear, where you can specify whether you want to play in the first available battleground area or designate a specific instance, such as 'Alterac Valley 2', for example. This way, you can sign up to play in the same battleground area as your mates. When the area you've selected opens, you'll automatically be transported there, and once the minimum number of



"You're an active agent in the battleground areas – player-triggered events can turn the tide of war"

SHANE DABIRI LEAD PRODUCER



players has been reached, then it's time for the killing to begin.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

The new system is something *WOW* has been crying out for, especially for those who've become bored of trundling around on collection quests and stalking

mobs. Comparing it to *Guild Wars* is easy, although the developer has made a concerted effort to enable you to utilise your environment as much as your character abilities. But really, what Blizzard seems to be going for is the feeling that you're playing *Warcraft III*, just with you actually being right there in the action instead of controlling your troops from on high.

It will be interesting to see just how much Blizzard manages to combat lag in *Battlegrounds* (since it's still problematic

in other areas of the game) and how this will develop the honour system. Also the fact that the Alliance far outnumbers the Horde on most servers (the popular theory is because the Alliance avatars are prettier) is bound to have some kind of impact. We'll be bringing you the definitive report on just how well Blizzard pulls this off in an upcoming issue. **PC**

SONG AND DANCE

WARSONG GULCH: THE CASUAL KILLER'S CHOICE

While Alterac Valley looks likely to dominate the higher levels' *Battlegrounds* play, Warsong Gulch is a decidedly lighter affair starting at level 21. But don't panic, the games are each divided into level categories, so you're not likely to get trounced too badly.

Warsong Gulch is a basic Capture The Flag affair, with a Tauren fort at one end and a Night Elf outpost at the other. Although the object is, as you'd expect, to bring the opposing team's flag back to your base, your team can also win by knocking out a large number of enemy players. Lack of NPC guards and monsters means it's a PvP outing. Warsong only accommodates 20 players, ten on each team, so the actions of each party member will be vital to the outcome of the game.



A flag being captured, yesterday.



WOW: flying the flag for MMOGs.



Everyone at the party celebrated when the red bull arrived.

THE HOTTEST NEWS ON THE PLANET...

**COMPUTER AND
VIDEO GAMES .COM**

CVG



FROM EUROPE'S NO.1 GAMING WEBSITE

FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: REX MUNDI GOWERLY & RAD ANDY

All change for Fight Club. It's been a long road getting from there to here. It's been a long time, but our time is finally near. We've had bust-ups in *UT2004*, dust-ups in *Battlefield 1942*, rust-ups in *Joint Ops* and must-ups in more games of *Counter-Strike: Source* than we care to mention. But things are drawing to an end for Fight Club in its current condition. Fear not, the epic ZONE versus Reader gaming confrontations will continue, but in all new configurations, permutations and variations.

To herald these changes, we're taking the next Fight Club night into a whole new arena – quite literally in fact. *City Of Heroes* is the setting, specifically the brand-new *Colosseum* update and all the madcap player-versus-player action that comes with it.

1v1 duels, 4v4 team battles, free-for-all 16-player deathmatches, giant battle royales – the ZONE Super Team will be out in force on June 23 to take you on.

Taking part is easy. Obviously, you'll need an active *City Of Heroes* account and a suitable character, but

assuming the spandex is washed, you'll be able to find us on the 'Defiant' European server, in the Galaxy City arena from 6.30pm. Go to one of the upstairs balconies and you'll find us dressed to kill, bursting for a scrap.

Don't worry if you're feeling underpowered by the way, as the arena combat can run a handicap system that brings everyone down to a suitable level. So even if it's your first night in Paragon City, you'll still be able to join in the fun. And if you don't want to fight, you'll be able to watch the action via the user-controlled camera drones.

Should all go well, we'll be repeating the fun and games the following month for a second bout of super-powered heroics. We'll also be looking into a super-special *Guild Wars* night soon after – more details soon.

No reason for all you traditionalists to worry though: despite the new direction, we'll still be hosting the very best multiplayer gaming servers in existence. As always, you can get all the details over at www.zonegames.co.uk. In the meantime, long live the new era of Fight Club!

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

WHO'S WHO – COH SPECIAL!

Jamie Sefton	Yorkshire-Man
Jamie Malcolm	Dr. McThistle
Will Porter	Night Porter
Paul Presley	Ginger-Vitus
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat



UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY JUNE 23

6.30pm – 8.30pm

*City Of Heroes – PvP Special 1**

THURSDAY JULY 21

6.30pm – 8.30pm

*City Of Heroes – PvP Special 2**

*all details subject to change. Be sure to check www.zonegames.co.uk for the latest information



Get your team together and fight.



Celebrity heroes will judge performances.



Co-ordinated attacks and a balanced team is vital for survival.

We'll also have prizes for the best costume on the night.

ZONECHAT



FIGHT CLUB may be changing its remit (see left), but **ZONE Chat** remains as forthright, stolid and unswerving as ever. Random nonsense masquerading as intellectual discourse – the stock in trade we've come to know, love and occasionally remember is taking place more than five minutes before the start time...

The last one was something of a truncated affair, pressing deadlines dictating a shorter night of high ribaldry and discourse. Not that it was without its moments. Plenty of talk about webcomics provided much fuel for the flames, with a lengthy debate as to whether Penny Arcade (www.penny-arcade.com) is actually funny or not (we think so), how good Perry Bible Fellowship is (cheston.com/pbf/archive.html), and Prezzer's own favourites www.homestarrunner.com and www.vgcats.com.

Back on games, we went into detail about the best in-game tutorials, quickly segueing into

Operation Flashpoint, Wandy pushing *Live For Speed* onto the masses, whether there should be a sequel to *Mafia* and why Will's been spending too much time with Jenna Jameson and Omar Sharif.

Next month we should be back to normal service, with the much longed-for

ZONE Chat competitions making a return, and no doubt going into much detail about the *City Of Heroes* Fight Club taking place the next night. You can join the usual gang of losers, boozers and midnight cruisers on

Wednesday, June 22, or indeed at any time of the day or night as the channel is open 24/7, whether **ZONE Chat** is on or not.

To join in, just grab hold of an IRC program (we have mIRC, Trillian and XFire on the cover disc this month for you to try out – all of which can give you access to the text communication side of the cyberspace world), log on to Quakenet and type '/join #pcz' to gain access to our virtual kingdom.

**WEDNESDAY
JUNE 22
5.00PM – 7.00PM**

LAN ROVER

Steve Randall goes on an excel-LAN-t adventure...

■ At the time of going to press, www.gameon.co.uk still hadn't made up its mind on when to hold the next event. It looks likely to be end of June or early July. Expect to find around 60 players – and not a single cheat among them (check out the video on the website to see how seriously these guys take banning cheats).

■ Meanwhile, www.moongames.co.uk is also hosting a 48-person event from June 3-5 in Kettering, Northamptonshire. It'll cost £30 of your hard-earned cash on the door if you want to get down there and show them what you're made of.

■ *Insomnia 24* is being hosted for up to 900 gamers from June 24-26 in the Grandstand at Newbury Racecourse. If you desire more information visit www.multiplay.co.uk – but by now you should know everything Multiplay-related as it's the biggest event organiser on the circuit.

■ June 4-5 has 40 lucky gamers heading to Bulwark Community Centre, Chepstow. £10 and a visit to www.triggerhappyplans.co.uk will secure your slot.

■ Meanwhile, north of the border www.glasgowlanparty.co.uk is continuing its regular event in Glasgow on June 11-12. Expect to pay £30 for the weekend and meet 24 other like-minded gamers.

■ You may have missed LANSE 29, a three-day event from June 3, but you'll still be in with a chance of getting one of the 48 seats in High Wycombe for LANSE 30 on July 1-3. Details of where to send your £20 can be found with all other information at www.lanse.co.uk.

■ If you want your party to feature here drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@gglan.co.uk. Scalper out.

GUILDHALL



▲ LIFE'S TOO SHORT TO SPEND IT ALONE – FIND NEW FRIENDS HERE...

To paraphrase Bill Murray's genius interpretation of the *Star Wars* theme: *Guild Wars*, if they should bar wars, please let these *Guild Wars*... Stay... Yes, the very game that Guildhall was invented for is finally here, so if you're looking to create a gang of brothers in NCsoft's latest MMO, this is the place...

CLAN: Khaos Gate Clan

CONTACT: imfartoostoned@hotmail.com

WEBSITE: www.kgc-clan.com

MAIN GAME: *Call Of Duty* and *Counter-Strike: Source*

DETAILS: We're a group of lads aged 16-39 from the UK, competing in ClanBase & Team Warfare. We have COD & CSS servers and a 40-man Teamspeak server. We're focused on having a laugh, but want dedicated recruits to help spread our name and reputation.

CLAN: Emperor's Hammer

CONTACT: fo@emperorshammer.org

WEBSITE: www.emperorshammer.org

MAIN GAME: *Star Wars: Galaxies*, *X-Wing Alliance*, *Star Wars Battlefront*

DETAILS: We're a gaming club for fans of the *Star Wars* series. We've been going strong for over ten years and are always on the look-out for new members. We have a very strong community spirit with hundreds of members from across the globe.

CLAN: [ESO] (Elite-special-operations)

CONTACT:

g7shadow@msn.com or general_osiris@hotmail.com

WEBSITE: www.elite-special-operations.com

MAIN GAME: *Counter-Strike: Source*, *SWAT 4*, *Joint Ops*

DETAILS: We've been established for about two years, currently have eight members and are looking to recruit more, aged 15 years and over. We have a Ventrilo and a CSS server and are looking for players who can have a laugh but also play well.

CLAN: Specops

CONTACT: ihickin@hotmail.com

WEBSITE: www.specopsglobal.com

MAIN GAME: *Microsoft Flight Sim 2004*, *Battlefield: Vietnam*

DETAILS: We're a flight sim clan and have our own aircraft/vehicles/navy/ground force team. We have members from all over the world and we use Teamspeak. If you thought *Flight Sim* was only flying, then take a look at what we do – skydiving to scuba diving.

CLAN: [The Self Preservation Society = (TSPS)=

CONTACT: mikethen@hotmail.co.uk

WEBSITE: www.tspss-clan.co.uk

MAIN GAME: *MOH: Allied Assault* and *Spearhead*

DETAILS: = (TSPS)= is run by several very experienced players in the game, with over 20 years of combined *MOH* experience! Joining will involve matches (both friendly and leagues), providing the best training in *MOH* multiplayer gaming that we can offer as a clan.

CLAN: Counter Terrorism Alliance

CONTACT: joker@c-t-a.com

WEBSITE: www.c-t-a.com

MAIN GAME: *Raven Shield*, *Joint Operations*

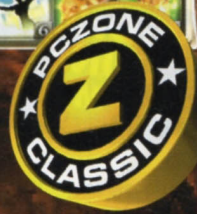
DETAILS: We're a mature clan with members from England, Norway, Canada and the USA. We've been together for over a year and meet around three times a week. We have dedicated gaming and Ventrilo servers and compete in one of the main ladders. Our main objective though is having a good laugh and playing some top games.

To feature in Guildhall, send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6PP.



Another unlucky victim of Cobbles.

GUILD WARS



£29.99 (£49.99 for *Collector's Edition*) | Pub: NCsoft | Dev: ArenaNet | ETA: Out Now | www.guildwars.com

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM, GeForce 3 or RADEON 8500 3D card with 32MB RAM and a 56k Internet connection

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, RADEON 9000 or GeForce 4 3D card with 64MB RAM and broadband

"Wanna be in my gang, my gang, my gang?" begs Paul Presley

INPERSPECTIVE

CITY OF HEROES

Reviewed Issue 155, Score 86%
With the *Issue 4* update, consensual PvP has been added to the all-action world of super-powered online role-playing, working in a far more organised manner than *Guild Wars*, although not as integral to the overall game.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 95%
Coming soon: PvP Battlegrounds (see page 102) for this stupidly successful MMO. Supposedly even more structured than GW's PvP areas, the recent interim PvP patch instead completely unsettled the game. Hopefully things will improve.

THERE IS just so much that is wonderful about *Guild Wars* that it's hard to know quite where to start. For the past half year, everyone and his dog has been harping on about how *World Of Warcraft* is the best thing since sliced bread and is surely the most accessible-to-all MMO ever made. Not any more, Pedro! *Guild Wars* steals the user-friendly gameplay crown so easily from Blizzard's behemoth, that it might as well sport a rakish moustache and call itself *Raffles The Gentleman Thief*.

While it's stuffing that particular trophy into the bag marked 'SWAG', it might trouble itself to 'alf inch the awards for visual beauty, balanced game mechanics, absorbing content and player

appeal, as it deserves to display all of those from its trophy cabinet.

LITTLE AND LARGE

Ploughing its own furrow with all the cold-eyed determination of a Colombian farmer insisting that the money's to be made in harvesting beetroot rather

than cocaine like everyone else, *Guild Wars* cocks a snook at the MMO genre and its standardised gaming templates, setting out from the offset to do things its own way and to hell with the consequences.

Take the character creation. How many other games give you the option of



"I, the ghost of Tom Selleck, will haunt you forever..."





Those damn Olsen twins.



Bet she trips over in a minute.



Perfectly straightforward.

starting a character at the maximum level from the get-go? Sure, there are restrictions involved. You'll be restricted to the PvP arena and have a limited selection of the overall skills available, but it means you don't have to spend weeks slogging through the level grind in order to experience the latter side of the game.

ONE FOR ALL

Not that there's much grinding to be found at the lower levels.

Guild Wars is one of the most well-balanced and perfectly paced RPGs we've played for ages, casting its lines like a master angler, reeling you in at exactly the rate needed to keep you hooked.

In one of the many, many wonderful ideas, every character you create is inextricably linked to the others on your account (all members of the same Guild, all sharing the same Friends list, all having access to the

JEUX SANS FRONTIÈRES



IT'S LIKE INTERNATIONAL IT'S A KNOCKOUT WITHOUT THE HUMOROUS NATIONAL COSTUMES

Or, if you prefer, it's the Ryder Cup of fantasy online role-playing (with added Koreans). Are you tired of all this one world, global village, we're all brothers underneath, political correctness? Course you are, and nothing says togetherness like a good spot of international warfare. Luckily, *Guild Wars* caters for your nationalistic/patriotic pride with its international tournaments. Guilds, teams and bands of passing wanderers who fancy a ruck (I said "ruck") with Johnny Foreign types can do their bit for either the European, American or Korean standings with a bit of three-way team PvP action in the Hall Of Heroes.

Victorious teams not only get to lord it up over their fallen foes, they get to earn the cheers of their countrymen with a global broadcast of who bested who, along with giving all players of their nation a morale boost in fights of their own. All that's missing are Belgians in inflatable pastry chef costumes chucking buckets of foamy water about the shop or Seve Ballesteros whooping with delight on the eighteenth hole. Maybe in the first expansion pack?

same storage vault). So much so that the more you explore and unlock with your role-playing character (as the game describes those who start at the ground floor), the more benefits you can earn for your level 20 PvP-only character and vice versa. Nice.

Part MMO, part *Magic: The Gathering*-style card game, part *UT*-style competitive deathmatching action, *GW* is that rare beast that tries to be all things to all people and pretty much succeeds on all fronts. ArenaNet itself eschews the term MMO and describes the game as a CORPG – a competitive online role-playing game, claiming that the 'massively' side of the multiplayer is just a by-product of having a single

gaming server and isn't really the crux of things.

ALL FOR YOU

It has a point. In other MMOs, 'instanced', personalised gaming areas for you and your small group are dotted about, and are very much the undercard to the main world's hundreds/thousands of



simultaneous players. Here, the majority of the *Guild Wars* world (Tyria, lore fans) is for you and you alone (or you and your small group of friends), with isolated public areas simply acting as staging posts for group creation and other administrative and social duties.

This has the effect of making the game world – and its inherent wonders, treasures and quests – seem to revolve around you. Again, this is unlike the feeling other games give you of being a

"Guild Wars casts its lines like a master angler, at exactly the rate needed to keep you hooked"

DYEING TONIGHT



IF YOU CAN'T MOD YOUR KIT, HOW ARE YOU GONNA ATTRACT DA KIDZ?

It's not that there's no crafting whatsoever in *Guild Wars*, just that it's almost completely out of the players' hands. As with the rest of the game's idiosyncratic approach to online gameplay mechanics, the noble art of Building Stuff™ works completely different here to elsewhere.

Basically, players don't build anything. Instead, they gather materials by recycling unwanted loot and taking it all to NPC crafters. Different crafters have different lists of goods to choose from, with the more powerful goods available from the more hard-to-find vendors.

The most you can actually do yourself is apply coloured dye to your hard-won weapons and armour, either buying basic colours from merchants, or searching for more rarefied hues in more advanced areas of the world (and by twonking fabled beasts on the head). Thus, despite the limited number of character appearance options, there is at least scope for personalisation further down the line.



Don't just stand there showing off. Capture those flags!

"It's almost the perfect system, combining instant action gratification with long-term rewards for the dedicated player"



One of the many PvP arenas.

minor cog in the overall wheel of virtual life, no more important than anyone else.

Guild Wars feels exciting to play as a result. You want to keep coming back to it to find out more, safe in the knowledge that you're not going to be bothered by griefers, boss campers, player killers, anti-social nobheads and the 1337 "f**k you n00b" crowd that mar so much of the online

gaming experience. Hell, you can even recruit NPC henchmen to support you on your travels if you really feel like going it alone.

LEET SKILLS

The key aspect of the game is the skill system.

Every character has eventual access to over 150 unique skills, although only eight can be loaded into your skill bar at any one time, forcing you



Posh and Becks try a new life together.

to think very carefully about what sort of combinations to put together. Again, thumbing its nose at other MMO conventions, these skills are all generally of an equal power, if more detailed, spectacular and harder to find at the higher levels. Much like *Pokémon* et al, the more common skills can be gained from various trainers in the public towns while the rarer abilities have to be earned through completing

missions or, better yet, capturing them from particularly skilled bad guys as you fight them. It's a system that rewards persistent play, continually providing the urge to get out and explore (a task made blessedly more practical thanks to the instant township teleporting system – no lengthy trips across miles of barren terrain just to meet up with friends). It doesn't make the mistake of penalising the

more casual adventurer either, with the basic skills still being perfectly valuable in tournament play, especially with a well-balanced team.

JACKANORY

Teamwork is vital in the group side of the game. Two types of missions are available for teams and guilds to work at – co-operative and competitive. The former tell the ongoing story of Tyria through a



Bloody cowboy builders.



"Don't point those things at me, missy."



Just another Sunday for the Kogaru boys.

mixture of cutscenes and quests. While these are mostly lengthy dungeon crawls (although don't let the 'dungeon' part of that fool you, the locales are varied and interesting and full of surprises), there are twists such as suddenly swamping you with powerful enemies and forcing you to flee for your life, all of which keeps the interest high.

STEAM IN

The other side of the game are the competitive PvP missions, essentially a series of *Unreal*

Tournament 2004-style team combat games. Find one of the arenas, form a group from the assembled players (or even in some cases just hitting 'enter mission' and letting the game form random teams), and play through a series of Team Deathmatches, Capture The Flag games or King Of The Hill events. Guilds that discover the larger arenas can even challenge each other to try and rise on the ArenaNet Guild Ladder, earning bonuses and plaudits from their members.

Again, the key is to master your skillsets, picking the right combinations to overcome the enemy and complement your team-mates. It's almost the perfect system, combining instant action gratification with long-term rewards for the dedicated player.



WHAT A LOT YOU GOT

THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION PROVIDES MORE GUILD FOR YOUR GOLD

Perhaps conscious of the no monthly subscription issue, NCsoft has provided two versions of the game to buy. The first is your standard £29.99 basic, vanilla, come as you are, no-nonsense, does what it says on the tin, standard package.

The second weighs in at a mere £49.99 of your English pounds and I'm robbin' meself guv, and contains such bountiful goodness as to make little babies weep for joy and butterflies flutter by in delight. Aside from the weighty box and game, you'll find a 120-page *Art Of Guild Wars* book rich in tapestry and colour, the *Guild Wars* soundtrack CD containing all the haunting melodies of BAFTA-winning game music composer Jeremy Soule, a free Logitech Internet Chat Headset plus three-month subscription to a Teamspeak server and an in-game 'Divine Aura' to make you the envy of all and sundry.

Is it worth it? Well the headset alone retails for around £24.99, so on that score it's an emphatic yes, although bear in mind that nothing dispels carefully conjured gaming atmosphere like hearing that the sexy, sultry female monk fighting alongside you actually sounds like a rabid, high-pitched half-Scot, half-Malaysian ex-hairdresser sitting at home in his underwear.



The term cannon fodder springs to mind.

That's *Guild Wars* all over. Perfectly balanced in a manner that could make Blizzard's much fabled balancing team look like amateurs. Every aspect of the game has been thought through to the nth degree, and serves to complement the experience as a whole. Nothing feels like a wasted effort or a tacked-on extra to appease the masses.

Sure, there are a few minor issues – party disbandment after teleporting, one or two lag issues – but nothing that can't be sorted out by a quick patch or two (and probably already has been by the time you read this). What's for certain is that *Guild Wars* is very much a world and law unto itself; the aforementioned idiosyncrasies force you to rethink everything you've become used to. It might not have the 'complete

world' feeling that you get from *EverQuest II* or *World Of Warcraft*, but it barely matters.

Guild Wars is all about the gaming experience and that experience is one of absolute pleasure from moment to moment. And it won't break the bank on a monthly basis either! You really can't ask for more than that. [A]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Instantly playable
- ✓ Beautiful game world
- ✓ Skill system very well balanced
- ✓ PvP excellently realised
- ✓ **NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTIONS!!!**
- ✗ Somewhat combat-obsessed
- ✗ Slightly fiddly interface

94

Oh! What a lovely Wars



Looks like someone needs to tend their garden better.

THE SAGA OF RYZOM

■ £16.99 (£8.49 monthly subscription) | Pub: NevraX |
Dev: NevraX | ETA: Out Now | www.ryzom.com

REQUIRES: PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a 56k modem
DESIRES: P4 2GHz, 1024MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a broadband connection

After a botched and bugged release, le MMORPG francais emerges reborn. But, wonders *Richie Shoemaker*, is it too little too late?

EVERY INITIATE to a persistent online world has to go through quarantine, a place to spend your formative hours in relative safety where you can get to grips with the universe you've subscribed to. *Ryzom* is no different in that respect, only the world into which you're thrown is so very different to the usual fantasy fare that you can quickly grow to despise it, or, in my

case, become enamoured with its often uncompromising ways.

Compared to how it was at launch, *Ryzom* is improved beyond recognition. Lag remains, but it's nowhere near as debilitating. NPC missions, trade and crafting now work as intended, although the interface remains cluttered and confusing and the storyline, after a stuttering start, has gotten into its stride. More

importantly, NevraX has a strong support system that should be the envy of the MMOG world. Ask a question and you get an answer in minutes, not days.

REALLY WILD SHOW

World Of Warcraft may be derivative and its charms may fade over the months, but Blizzard knows more than anyone in the PC game industry how to make a game accessible. In contrast, *Ryzom* has a skill system that promotes flexibility, yet the gameplay requires specialisation. By way of example, you can hang around your starting area building a character adept in all four disciplines: combat, foraging, crafting and magic. However, unless you focus on one or two, the jack-of-all-trades approach limits your ability to progress once you enter the main world.

Contradictory and confusing it may be, but *Ryzom* is still easy to fall in love with. This is partly

thanks to an altruistic community, partly because the world into which you're thrown is just such an interesting one. You have a planet rich with alien wildlife that seems happy to exist on its own terms whether you interact or not. The learning curve is steep, but there's a lot to experience at all levels and many diverse places to go. The otherwise impressive creature AI group dynamics fall apart in combat, which is fiddly and lacks immediacy, but for world realisation and uniqueness, you immediately feel a part of *Ryzom*.

Whether the game will remain alive in a year's time remains to be seen. At launch, coming as it did alongside *EQII*, *WOW*, *City Of Heroes* and expansions for the likes of *EVE*, *Anarchy Online*, *DAOC* and *EQ Live*, things looked bleak indeed. To have improved the game to such a degree is an impressive feat, but perhaps greater challenges lie ahead: US and European English

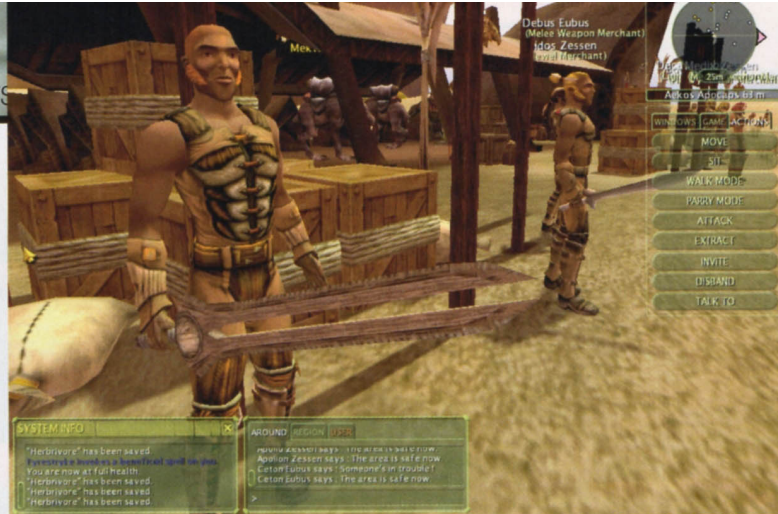
servers were recently merged, redundancies appear likely and as much as *Ryzom*'s unique sci-fi premise is sure to be an attraction, it will also be a barrier to the mass of online gamers who like what they know. Regardless, after six months of polishing *Ryzom* is now worth investigating. **PC2**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Unique and expansive sci-fi world
- ✓ Deeply layered skill system
- ✓ Always plenty to do
- ✓ Helpful community
- ✗ Complicated interface
- ✗ Not as immediate as some might like

72

In fine condition but with an uncertain future



Piano-tuning forks are worth fortunes on eBay.



Nothing to see here. Move along.



Each of the four races starts in their own enclave.

INPERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST II

Reviewed Issue 150, Score 95%
It's goblins and wizards, but the experience is far more evolved than most people give Sony credit for. Of all the traditional fantasy MMOGs, this has to be the most consistent.

ANARCHY ONLINE

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 77%
Like *Ryzom*, *AO* was released too early and looked like dying an early death, but the developer stuck with it and now four years on it stands tall as one of the finest sci-fi MMORPGs in circulation.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

MULTIPLAYER

■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA LA | ETA: Out Now | www.lordoftherings.eagames.com | Players: 2-8

REQUIRES PIII 1.3GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a 56K Internet connection (for two-player games) or a broadband connection (for more than two players)

DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a 1MB broadband connection

Martin Korda joins the online battle for Middle-earth

FASTEST finger wins. That's what the majority of RTS games usually degenerate into online and sadly, *The Battle For Middle-earth* is no different. That's not to say it's not fun, but if we're honest, we've seen it all before. Build an army as fast as you can, spill out of your castle and strike fast at the enemy. He who does this quickest usually wins. He who tries to do anything different, usually loses.

Whether you choose to play the 1v1 or 2v2 ranking games (that automatically find you an opponent of a similar level), or jump onto one of the numerous custom game servers that can cater for up to eight players, you can expect the same experience every time.

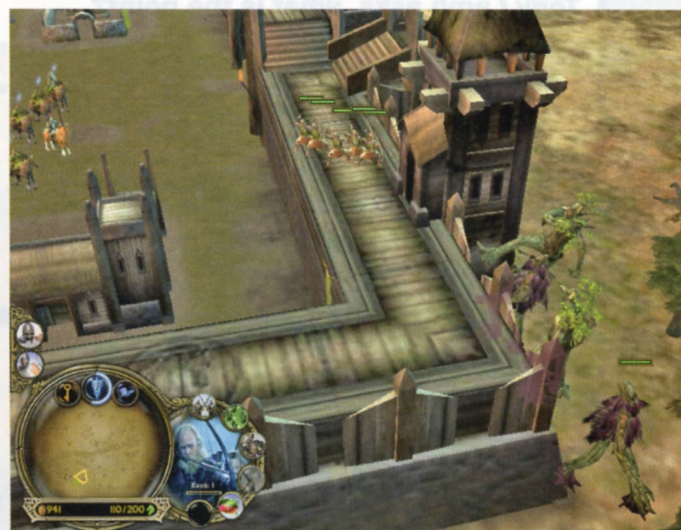
Which is a shame as with a bit more imagination, this could have perhaps been the best online RTS ever. Why are there



Where are the siege levels of Minas Tirith and Helm's Deep?

no recreations of Minas Tirith or Helm's Deep, where you're automatically urged to play as good or evil, and tasked with either overrunning the fortress or holding off the enemy for a set amount of time? Why indeed.

However, there are plenty of positives here too. You can play as any of the four factions from the films (Gondor, Rohan, Mordor and Isengard), all of which come with their own strengths and weaknesses, and



Does anyone have a match?

styles of play. What's more, fun-sapping rushing is virtually impossible thanks to every team starting off in a walled-off fortress – which is good news.

The presentation is slick, while games tend to run fairly smoothly even on a 600K broadband pipe, though if you have a firewall, you may experience some connection

problems. That said, *TBFME*'s online games are undoubtedly fun to play, but ultimately, this has to go down as one massively missed opportunity.

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 149)	91
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	72

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft | ETA: Out Now | www.splintercell.com | Players: 2-4

REQUIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a broadband connection **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a 2MB broadband connection

MULTIPLAYER

Paul Presley conquers his fear of the dark with some help from a friend or two



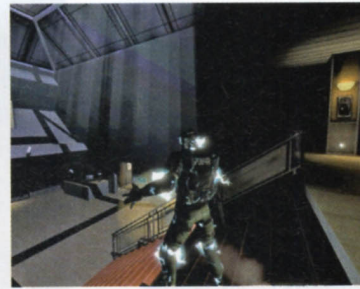
That's one stealthy door.



"Don't move. I'm a chiropractor."



Hide and seek, the easy way.



Rediscovering that spark.

COULD someone explain to me why, in this day and age, it takes several days of dropped connections from ubi.com and unexplained inabilities to either create or connect to someone else's server, and even then the only way we were able to experience the co-operative side of Sam Fisher's latest adventure was over a LAN?

Assuming you can get it to work, though (maybe at LAN

parties?) you're in for a bit of a treat. I'm not going to sit here and say it's the best online experience evah!!111!! or anything, but it's certainly a step in the right direction for future games. Only four maps, but well enough designed to allow for all manner of sneaky, stealthy two-player moves (if unintentionally hilarious/homo-erotic ones). It does have the effect of leaving you with a taste for more, as

though this were just a taster, a demo for a fuller game.

Otherwise we have the two-to four-player third-person spies versus first-person mercenaries game seen in *Pandora Tomorrow*, some extra maps and new gadgets, and a few new modes (Capture The Flag and Deathmatch, basically). As before, it takes a lot of patience to get used to the strange dynamic at work here, and you

will spend your first few hours completely flummoxed and mostly dead until you get into the swing of things.

The additions don't particularly enhance the basic experience or offer anything substantially new, and the existing quibbles about it using a completely different engine (and therefore a completely different control system) still remain, although the co-op mode makes

up for that if, as we said, you can get it running. Bottom line, don't buy *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* purely for the multiplayer, but do see it as a stepping stone towards a much greater game yet to come.

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 154)	91
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	79

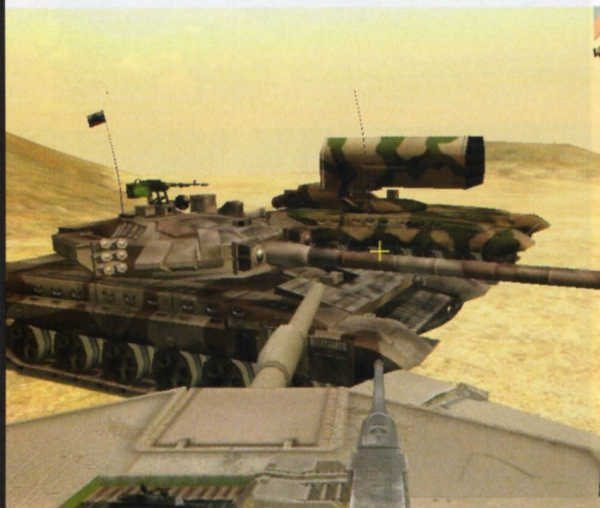
POINT OF EXISTENCE 3

SIZE 1.1GB **REQUIRES** Full version of Battlefield Vietnam

www.pointofexistence.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb asks, what is the point?



That's a hell of a big barrel.

IS IT JUST a re-hash of *Desert Combat*? Well, there are similarities, but *POE* is a star in its own right. It's not as good yet, but it's well on the way.

The background story sees the cash-strapped and war-torn country of Sudan suddenly blessed by the discovery of large

oil reserves. They use this bounty to buy Russian arms and assistance in suppressing a popular rebellion, but when neighbouring Kenya discovers that the oil is under their territory too and the Sudanese won't share, they turn to America for help. Before long, there's an all-



Thought these didn't work in the desert?

out US/Russian conflict ensuing, bringing back those wonderful memories of the good ol' Cold War. Happy times.

Battlefield Vietnam is now spawning an ever-increasing range of mods and other goodies. *POE* is a whopper, swallowing up huge tracts of

hard drive with its vast range of maps, vehicles, sounds, skins and more in-ye-face action than you can shake a tank at. Much of it's familiar, but it's worth it nonetheless. So delete your home accounts, letters and arty pictures of Jordan because *POE* will keep you happier for longer.

With cracking gameplay, a third army in the offing and a *BF2* version under development, *Point Of Existence* is a class act.

PCZONE VERDICT **88**
DC for BFV? QED...

FRAG.OPS 2.16

SIZE 590MB **REQUIRES** Full version of UT2004

www.frag-ops.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb cams up for action

IN ESSENCE. *Frag.Ops* follows the tried-and-tested team-based shooter route à la *Counter-Strike* and many others. This is a mixed blessing because while the gameplay may be more approachable, a mod has to be pretty good or it just won't survive. Luckily, *Frag.Ops* is very enjoyable and makes great use of its *UT2004* environment to provide a visually-rich and always entertaining experience.

Varying slightly from the terrorist vs counter-terrorist storyline – here it's special ops vs mercenaries – *Frag.Ops* uses the familiar cash reward and buy-your-own-weapons front-end, offering a weapons loadout that should be familiar if you're a FPS aficionado. The similarities end here though, as *FO* offers far more to keep you happy.

First, there are vehicles here, and you get to build them yourself. Don't ask how – just enjoy it. Jeeps with guns and wicked-looking helicopters can



Nice, but it could use a jollier colour scheme.

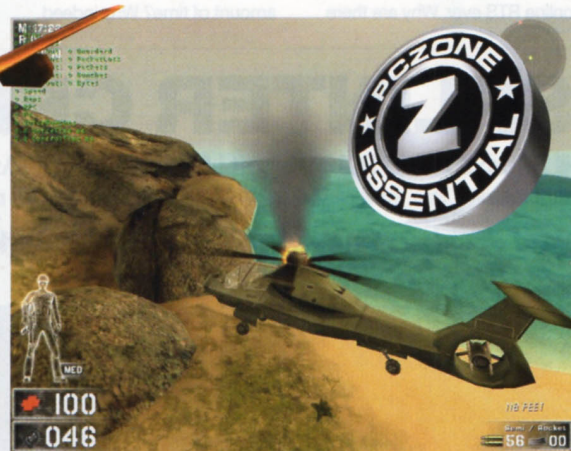
be used to jump around the maps, achieving objectives and raining death on the opposition.

Next are 'Traits' – a clever variation on the class structure which means you can experiment with no less than 16 skillsets. Weapon recoil is another feature you need to master too.

So, does this mod have any faults? Well, bots are dumb as

always, some animations are a bit wooden, but the maps and skins are convincing. Falling neatly into the semi-realistic brackets, *Frag.Ops* offers good all-round entertainment.

PCZONE VERDICT **83**
Good, clean, bloody fun



Damn these coal-powered choppers.



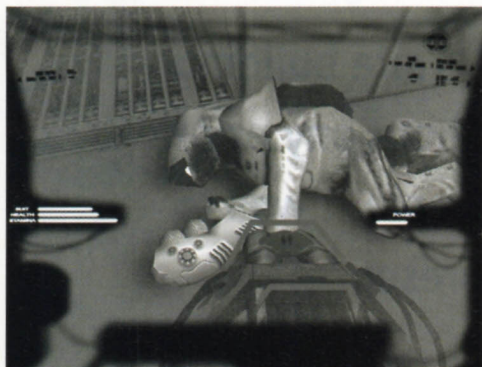
"It's no good, I can still see your face."

HOLLOW MOON BETA 2

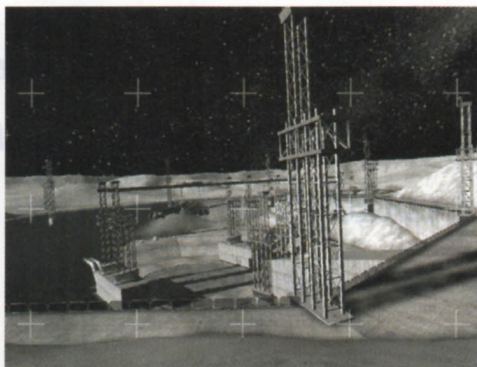
SIZE 68MB REQUIRES Full version of UT2004 www.planetunreal.com/ivangraphics/hollowmoon/

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb gets lost for words...



Don't adjust your set, it's meant to be like this.



Paging Martin Landau...



...Or should that be Arnie?

OK, I ADMIT it, this one had me stumped. Almost. What can you say about a mod that's only in black-and-white, has constant music and no sound effects, is puzzling to play and largely devoid of action? Well, it's bizarre, for a start.

The background story is that you're a heavy machinery

specialist who arrives at a moon research colony, only to find the place almost deserted – the only inhabitants seeming to be strange creatures that aren't too happy to see you. It's then up to you to explore the huge underground base, find out what's going on and avoid getting yourself killed along the

way. Formulaic perhaps, but never like this.

Intriguingly, the black-and-white appearance actually adds to the atmosphere. It makes the moonbase distinctly foreboding for a start (although that could also be the awfully grainy view you have through your helmet visor – haven't these people

heard of flash wipes)? The music was another matter though and I could have cheerfully throttled the machine after no more than a minute of it. The aliens are a bit weak too, but given time let's hope that changes.

So, *Hollow Moon's* presentation is original, but will it catch on? Too esoteric perhaps.

The environments and concept have promise though, so maybe a more mainstream version would do well.

PCZONE
VERDICT

69

Definitely intriguing,
if weird as hell

OPERATION PEACEKEEPER 0.16

TOTAL CONVERSION

SIZE 275MB REQUIRES Full version of Battlefield Vietnam www.opk-mod.de/

Tony Lamb dons his blue beret...

ALTHOUGH Croatia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia are now becoming popular holiday destinations, the Balkans have long been a hotpot of nationalistic and religious dispute, and few decades have gone by without one ethnic group finding an excuse to go around slaughtering the others.

The last eruption of violence was in the 1990s, and *Operation Peacekeeper* is set on the front line between the might of the Serbian army as it tries to annex Kosovo into the 'Greater Serbia', and German peacekeeping troops under the UN banner who have to stop them. The Serbs had a modern, well-equipped army, hence the peacekeepers didn't find it easy.

Operation Peacekeeper approaches this difficult military situation very skilfully and you can fight for either side with

period-accurate weapons and vehicles. You can also experience some of the more infamous locations on maps which are well laid out and lend themselves readily to the close-quarters scrapping and tense atmosphere of the time. Teamwork is of the essence as the terrain is ideal for guerrilla warfare and sudden conflict can be just around the corner. At the moment, there aren't any jets, but the second version is due soon and will see both sides getting some much-needed airpower added.

This is a fun mod, but it needs more online support (and bots). Given this, better aircraft and more development, it could do well.



Nice parking mate.



Hey folks! It's Tribber Time!



Here's some peace you can keep.



PCZONE
VERDICT

75

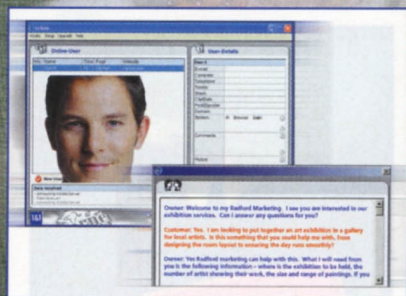
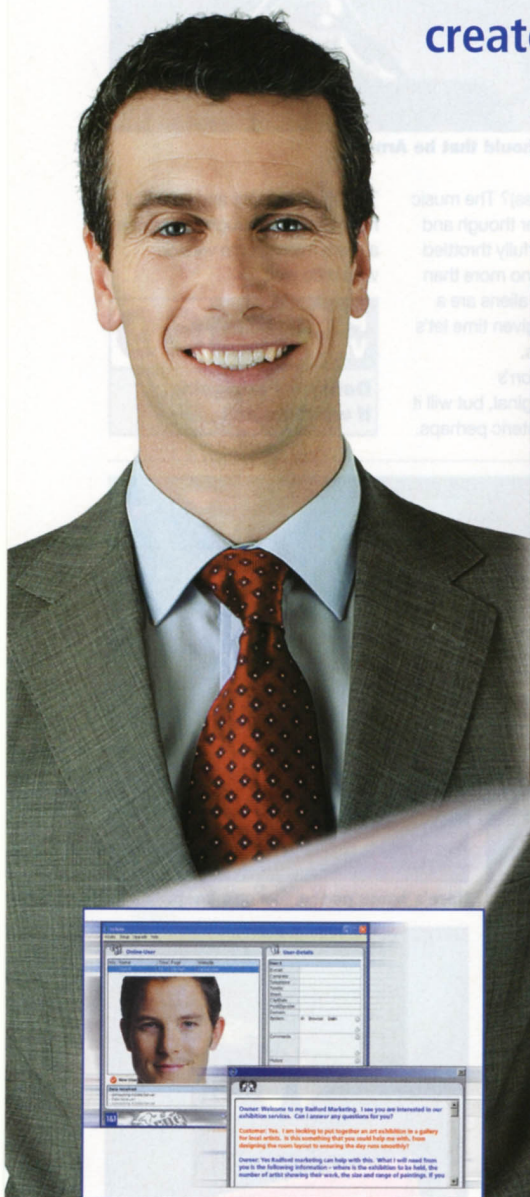
A dirty war revisited

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Craig Radford
www.radfordmarketing.co.uk



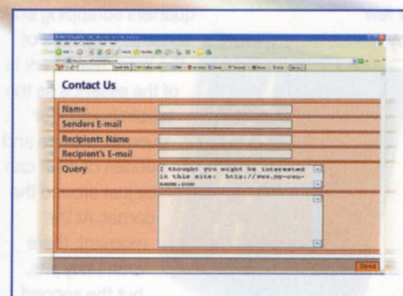
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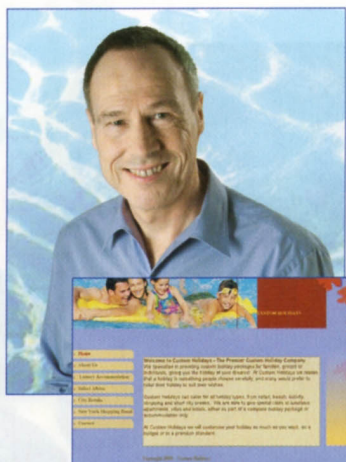
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www.studymusic.co.uk



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COMMUNITY CHEST



FAR CRY

Want to prolong your action-packed sightseeing tour of the South Pacific? Then step this way – Sam Kiildsen is your guide...

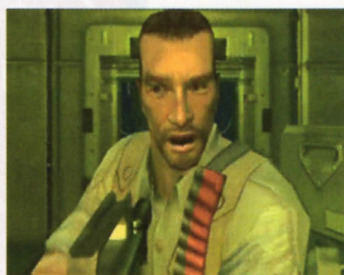
Everyone loves a bit of *Far Cry*; it's one of the best games of last year, after all. And despite it being barged out of the limelight by newer offerings like *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*, rabid fans (like our very own Dave Woods) need not fear – thanks to a legion of *Far Cry*-lovin' Web users, Jack Carver's adventures ain't about to end anytime soon. There's a ton of extra material out there for you to get your hands on – it's just a matter of looking in the right place. And we've done just that so you don't have to...



FAR CRY HQ (FANSITE)

farcry.gamesweb.com

The premier *Far Cry* fan resource on the Interweb, this German-based site (don't worry, most of it's in English too) is chock-full of mods, add-ons and maps for download. There's also a wealth of *Far Cry* info and artwork to peruse, as well as a discussion forum. The latter might only be useful if you're fluent in German, sadly.



MACHINIMA TEST VIDEO (MOVIE)

www.gamersplaceonline.com/farcrycoolesttestdemo.wmv

This atmosphere-drenched horror movie – set in the single-player map 'Cooler' – was made and recorded using only the *Far Cry* editor. It's only a minute long, and Wes Craven isn't going to lose sleep, but the maker is working on a full-blown version as you read this. Versatile chap.



DCL (MODDING TOOL)

web.telia.com/~u31225218/fc/dcl/

DCL stands for 'Dynamic Class Loader'. Got it? No? Well, once you've installed this app, you can add all number of items directly into the game. The only requirement is that the items you load into *Far Cry* have to be developed specifically with DCL use in mind. Clear?



SHOOTING RANGE (MAP)

w1.312.telialia.com/~u31225218/fc/shootingrange_v30.zip

The single-player map doesn't contain any enemies, but it does boast two unique elements: a beach racetrack that tells you your lap times and a shooting range that awards points depending on your accuracy over increasing distances. Lovely-looking and fun to mess about in.



HARD (MOD)

www.hard.fraggers.com

While *HARD* isn't actually finished yet, it's the mod that the *Far Cry* community seems most excited about. More of a total conversion than anything else, *HARD* adds new single- and multiplayer game modes, weapons, settings and vehicles. Take a look at the website for updates, or even if you want to pitch in.



PANDORA (MAP)

farcry.gamesweb.com

Opening the original Pandora's Box was a bad idea, but opening this Pandora's zipfile is not, especially if you're into multiplayer madness. Lots of water, lots of jungle to hide in and vehicles scattered around make this one of the better user-made maps – there's even a caged Trigen to unleash upon the opposition...



MISSILE ATTACK (MAP)

farcry.gamesweb.com

This single-player map sees you trying to secure yourself a new set of wheels and put a dent in Krieger's nuclear ambitions to boot. It features an extensive animated intro sequence (complete with so-bad-it's-good voice-acting), a huge rainforest to fight your way through and some memorable scripted sequences.



HDR LIGHTING (VISUAL EFFECT)

www.farcry-thegame.com

This HDR (High Dynamic Range) lighting really adds to *Far Cry*. The jaw-droppingly gorgeous effect is yours if you own a GeForce 6-series card and comes with the 1.3 patch. Disable antialiasing and type "v_hdrrendering 1" into the console to trigger it. Boost HDR by substituting the "1" with any number from 2-14.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill jacks in to *The Matrix Online*



FUNNY OLD game. While section editor Prezzer is enjoying the delights of burgeoning fatherhood, I'm running round a virtual world pretending to be him. In traditional NeverQuest fashion, I've leapt into his body and embarked on a series of errands by proxy. Picking up the action with no tangible reference point, it appears that my first task is to deliver a book to somebody before it's too late. Now I'm no aficionado of the *Matrix* film series, but I was led to believe that the activities of Keanu et al were generally somewhat more heroic than avoiding library fines.

Nevertheless, I set off towards the intended recipient of said tome. To add to the mundanity of it all, it's pissing

over tit and fall face first into a pile of old tyres. It's an undignified experience, but fortunately nobody is there to see it, as the world of *The Matrix* seems largely bereft of humanity.

Dusting myself down, I continue the task in hand, something that requires little more than being able to walk and use an elevator. Meeting up with the aforementioned Zion hacker, a woman called Watch, I escort her to a green-haired bloke called Firewall, who could at least have had the decency to put a shirt on. While they speak to each other in binary, I listlessly wander around the squalid apartment.

With enthusiasm at a low, my spirits are lifted by the sight of a dartboard,

all the same, and we bond by administering a brutal kicking to a security guard. It's a cathartic experience, and one that we waste no time in repeating with a mouthy member of the shaven-headed Crossbones gang. Shooting him from about three feet has little effect, but I do manage to fell him with a shrewdly timed boot to the Niagaras. "Cool," opines Darkjesters in one of his more verbose moments.

JACK YOUR BODY

Fleeing the felled skinhead, I steal his beanie hat and tie-dyed T-shirt, both of which I change into in order to complete the drug-dealer look. Nowhere to be seen, Darkjesters appears to have his own agenda – or his mum's calling him down for his tea – and I continue the mission alone.

I eventually find my man, one Hollis Berman, who it appears is ready to do his first pill. As he says: "While you were fighting I had time to think about my decision and... I think I'm ready to find out what the Matrix is."

Good luck mate, and don't forget to drink plenty of water. I'm off... Turned up, clocked out, jacked out. [M]

"While they speak to each other in binary, I listlessly wander around"

down with rain and I've come out in a T-shirt, albeit supplemented by a pair of leather kecks and knee-high boots. With my shock of ginger hair rapidly moistening, I seek solace in a bus shelter. Sitting at a bus stop waiting for a bus that never comes: so far it's more like *Coronation Street* than *The Matrix*.

MISSION POSSIBLE

Giving up on public transport, I set off on foot and manage to deliver the book with impunity. With my first mission under my leather belt, I phone up my boss, a dreadlocked blonde called Tyndall, and ask her what else she's got. The *Matrix* equivalent of a mini-cab controller, she consults the job list and sends me to escort a Zion hacker to crack into a Machine network. This sounds more like it, and I'm fired up enough to attempt some bullet-time gymnastics. Launching myself into an ambitious airborne forward roll, I go arse

mounted on the wall at what appears to be regulation height. Overjoyed at the opportunity to chuck a few arrows, in a cruel twist of fate my heroic abilities don't extend to removing the darts from the board, and I have to settle for the more tedious task of saving the world.

PILLS 'N' THRILLS

Back on the streets – pretty clean for a change, must have been the rain – I get on the blower to the boss, who orders me to steal an informational dossier on an Exile for Zion. Again, this involves little more than getting in a piss-stained lift, and for all the difference it makes, I might as well be delivering pizzas to a council estate. Fittingly, the next task involves delivering some pills. As back-up, I enlist the help of the passing Darkjesters, a chin-gloved dude sporting some natty threads.

"Nice shirt," I say, but he's not one for a chat. It's nice to have some company

Prezzer



In the future, all bus shelters are like this.



"You seem to have kicked me in the nuts, Mr Anderson."



Pratfalls are a sub-routine in *The Matrix*.

HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

FORCE FEEDBACK



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

WAND Technologies thinks that even the most realistic of today's gaming environments are mundane and rather limiting. The company has just announced its DiabetX chip, a dedicated processor capable of creating experiences so true to life that gamers will be like "OMFG!"

The primary function of DiabetX will be to run Artificial Intelligence routines in hardware rather than in software, thus enabling the CPU to spend more time on tasks such as downloading *Episode III* rips and displaying the temperature of the floppy drive to nine decimal places.

Other features of DiabetX include Contrived Stupidity (CS), ensuring that computer-controlled characters behave more naturally than ever before. CS players will say things like "where do I take the hostages?" and "what key is it 2 change team?" and "lol im drumnk", before shooting team-mates with a semi-automatic and getting kicked for a negative score.

CS players can also be configured to accuse others of using 'cheets' and to periodically mouth off in what looks like German but could be Dutch. It's also possible to have them banned and spend the rest of their time attempting to hack the server using a script they downloaded from a Russian crack site, while simultaneously sending threatening emails to the server's administrator claiming they know where he lives.

The DiabetX chip also introduces key new features to compliment your videocard, including full-screen uncle-aliasing, where every texture in the game is changed to a picture of your mother's brother, and multiplex barnetmapping. Never again will you have lifeless hair online, with even the floppiest comb-over being rendered on a per-follicle basis. Damage modelling is also improved, with St John's Ambulance crews loitering just beyond the map's boundaries, with accurately rendered Thermos flasks. The chip will be available sometime.

EXTRA LARGE XL

**Official announcement from
ATI: 512MB cards in production**

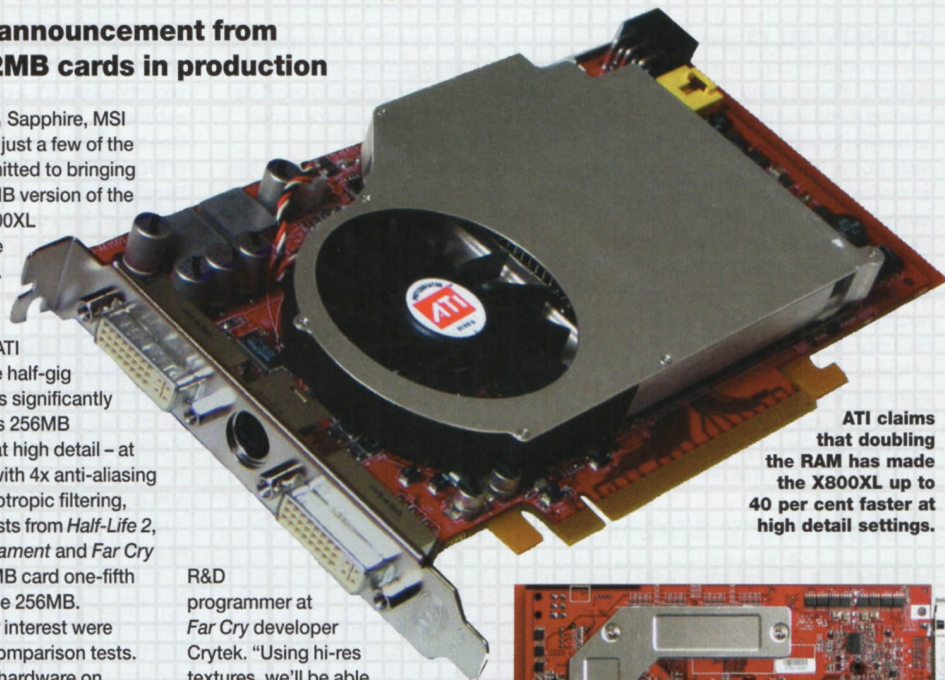
GIGABYTE, **Sapphire**, **MSI** and **ABIT** are just a few of the names committed to bringing you the 512MB version of the **RADEON X800XL** in time for the summer hols. Benchmark graphs provided by ATI show that the half-gig card performs significantly better than its 256MB counterpart at high detail – at 1600x1200, with 4x anti-aliasing and 16x anisotropic filtering, frame-rate tests from *Half-Life 2*, *Unreal Tournament* and *Far Cry* had the 512MB card one-fifth faster than the 256MB.

Of greater interest were the **NVIDIA** comparison tests. Against rival hardware on similar settings, the new **X800XL** was ahead of both the **GeForce 6800 GT** and **Ultra** in every game bar *Doom 3*, and to demonstrate how 512MB videocards are capable of high-definition rendering, benchmarks were rerun at 1920x1440 and at 2048x1536, with the **XL** hitting 50fps and higher in *Half-Life 2*.

"The card will allow us to raise the visual quality bar," says **Andrey Khonich**, senior

R&D programmer at *Far Cry* developer **Crytek**. "Using hi-res textures, we'll be able to improve quality of soft-shadows, lighting, world and character detail to bring quality never seen before in real-time videogames."

Although UK pricing hasn't been announced, it's likely the fat boy version will cost £250-£300. It will retain the same basic specs as the 256MB **X800XL**, with 400MHz core and 980MHz memory, but will include a **VIVO** connector and dual **DVI** outputs.



ATI claims that doubling the RAM has made the **X800XL** up to 40 per cent faster at high detail settings.

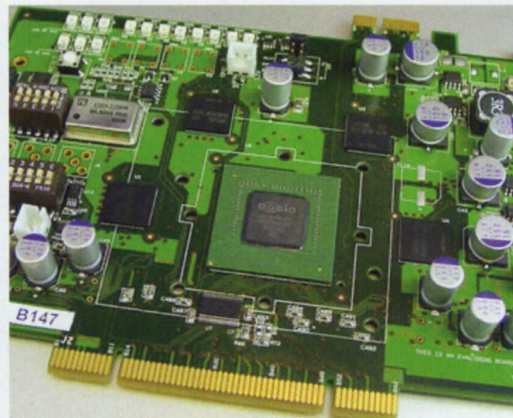


"This card will allow us to bring quality never seen before in real-time videogames"

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

AGEIA ups the physics ante one more time...

PhysX
by AGEIA



It may look dull, but it's anything but.

AGEIA Technologies thinks that even the most realistic of today's gaming environments are rather limiting. You might think it's pretty smart to have ragdoll bodies that crumple when you shoot them, or chairs that knock over when you bump into them, but the physics involved are quite modest – it boils down to a small number of objects interacting with their surroundings. **AGEIA** wants to increase the number of those objects a hundredfold, and do that by moving the processing of them away from the CPU and giving it to a new, dedicated chip – its **PhysX** Physics Processing Unit, or **PPU**.

It doesn't stop at bodies and furniture either. The **PPU** can also handle all collision detection, fluids simulation, reproduction of complex items such as hair and cloth, and large-scale particle simulation for lifelike explosions – any game employing the **NovodeX** Physics engine will be accelerated, such as **Epic's** **Unreal Engine 3.0**. Oh baby. www.ageia.com



REVIEWS
Gaming PCs rated



DEAR WANDY
For all your troubles, big or small



WATCHDOG
They can't escape from Suzy

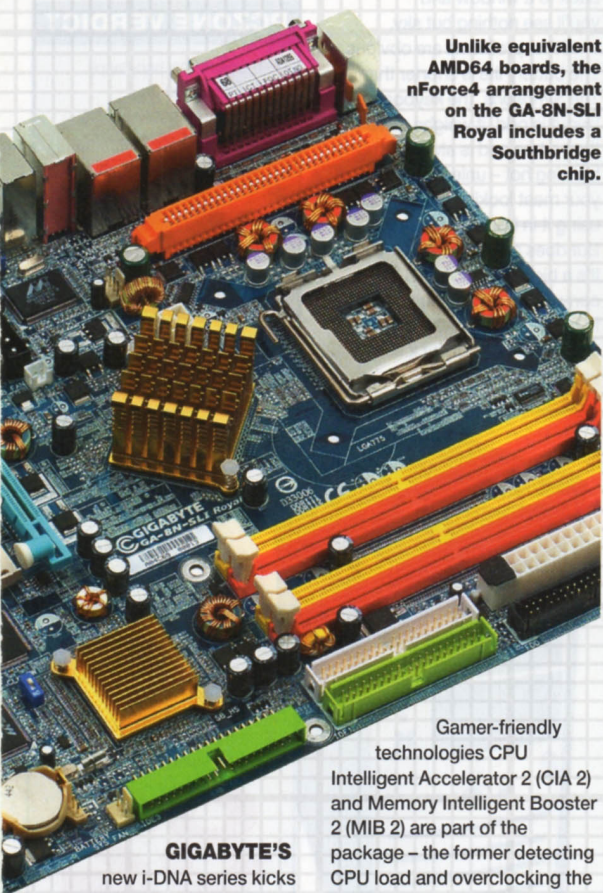


BUYER'S GUIDE
Best buys here

PENFORCE 4

GIGABYTE motherboard first to offer SLI to Pentium 4 users

Unlike equivalent AMD64 boards, the nForce4 arrangement on the GA-8N-SLI Royal includes a Southbridge chip.



GIGABYTE'S

new i-DNA series kicks

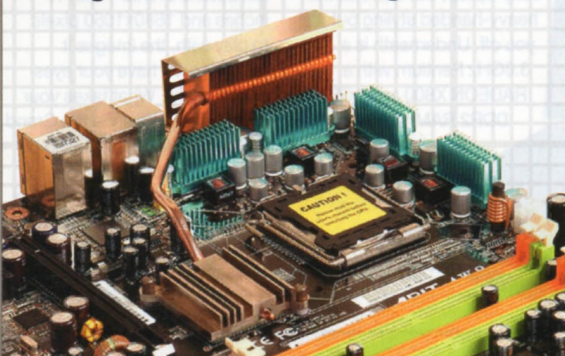
off with the GA-8N-SLI Royal, a motherboard built around the nForce4 SLI Intel Edition chipset. LGA775 Intel owners can now benefit from doubling up their GeForce cards as well as 1066MHz front-side bus speeds and DDR-2 667 memory. The Royal has even been to Corsair Testing labs for certification with the company's TWIN2X1024A-5400UL memory modules.

The GA-8N-SLI also includes support for up to six SATA II drives, each with a theoretical data transfer rate of 300GB per second, as well as three PATA drives and various RAID configurations. GIGABYTE also provides its GN-BTD02 Bluetooth wireless adaptor, which hooks up to one of the board's ten USB ports and means you can talk with your mobile phone, gaming headset or any other Bluetooth-enabled device.

Gamer-friendly technologies CPU Intelligent Accelerator 2 (CIA 2) and Memory Intelligent Booster 2 (MIB 2) are part of the package – the former detecting CPU load and overclocking the processor to six predefined limits, the latter fattening out memory bandwidth by up to 10 per cent. The board is available now.

SILENCE OF THE FANS

ABIT announces noiseless heat-pipe arrangement for Northbridge



Boards featuring ABIT's 'Silent Outside Thermal Exhaust System' will be available from May.

DESKTOP TOOLS and simple BIOS options mean overclocking is no longer a black art – it's something pretty much anyone can do. But there are dangers. When you turn up the wick the temperature soars, and despite it being one of the most common causes of system instability, heat is something very few of us give proper consideration. And heat doesn't just come from the CPU.

Look at any motherboard and you'll count at least two sinks – the largest over the processor, and in the case of Intel boards, two more for the Northbridge and Southbridge. And while it's common for board manufacturers to include fans, and for third party manufacturers such as Thermaltake to offer heat-pipe replacement coolers, ABIT is the first board-maker to offer an integrated solution.

"Silent OTES will be a boon for performance users who need optimal cooling in a quiet environment," says ABIT's product marketing manager. The system features an aluminium sink and an all-copper base and copper-finned collection module to boot. Heat is exhausted by air from the CPU fan.

DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update Utility	7.0.0.1019	18-Apr-04	0.8MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Unified Driver	5.10	17-Sep-04	26.8MB	nvidia.com
NVIDIA	nForce4 Standalone	6.53	17-Mar-05	31.3MB	nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.56v	12-Apr-04	1.4MB	viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 5.3	9-Mar-05	23.1MB	ati.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	Release 71.89	14-Apr-05	17.9MB	nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Creative Audigy 4 Pro Update	3.00.55	20-Dec-04	20.95MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

COOLERGIANT, the UK-based subsidiary of **Enermax**, has released a **four-port USB 2.0 hub** in a rather natty-looking aluminium case complete with 1m cable and mandatory blue LEDs. Measuring barely more than the four ports combined at just 53x95x30mm, the device can be left self-powered or used in conjunction with the supplied 5V 2A DC adaptor. www.coolergiant.co.uk



New Jersey outfit **PNY** has launched a card which it claims will bring GeForce 6800 features to the mainstream. The £79.99 **Verto GeForce 6200** features four pipelines, 350MHz core, 500MHz memory and Shader 3.0-compliance. More at www.pny-europe.com.



Lan Pirates has announced its new Athlon 64 3500+ based **Scimitar** machine, with a base-price of £839. The machine features a 6600GT, 512MB RAM and a 250GB hard drive. If it's built like our favourite **Buccaneer** and **Brigantine**, put it on your shopping list. Configure one at www.lan-pirates.co.uk



Aurora Star Wars Edition is an **Alienware** PC made to look like the lunchbox I had in 1977. The systems are AMD-based and come in **Imperial** and **Rebel** designs, with exclusive wallpapers and desktop skins. www.alienware.co.uk

Fragwear.co.uk has released a range of clothing aimed at **hormonal gamers**. Shirt slogans include: "I haven't got a girlfriend but I have 50GB of porn" – an ideal gift. www.fragwear.co.uk



GAMES GOLIATHS

**GAMING
PCS**

Need some more grunt for your gaming? Let *Phil Wand* show you where it's at...

XTREME TI 3.6

■ Price: £2,200 | Manufacturer: rockdirect | Phone: 08709 909090 | www.rockdirect.com

The Governor of California of notebooks



THE XTREME

is an ugly brute, more Samsonite luggage than sexy laptop, but don't let the heavy-handed styling put you off. Underneath is a 3.6GHz Pentium with a RADEON X800 and 1GB DDR2 RAM whisking up benchmark scores

that would redden the cheeks of most desktops.

And then there's that tombstone of a lid – with 17-inches and 1680x1050 pixels to play with, the images it produces will have your eyes out on stalks. What takes your breath away initially is the Grand Canyon scale of it; the icing on the cake is technology that makes the colours sing and the shadows turn blacker than Loch Ness. Called X-glass, it works brilliantly but features a highly reflective surface – sit with your

back to a window and you'll see nothing but sky.

Other problems are obvious. The battery life is shorter than *The Simpsons*, the keyboard layout is odd, it weighs more than a tree and is always blowing hot – unless you want your meat looking like your veg, using it in bed is inadvisable. But does anyone really care? It's a big, expensive, 3.6 litre convertible, and if you're going to get old-womanish about practicalities, best stick with your £399 Packard Bell.

SPECIFICATIONS

Notebook consisting of: Pentium 4 560 (3.6GHz), 256MB RADEON X800, 7.1 Audio, 1GB DDR2 RAM, 120GB RAID-0, 17-inch X-glass WSXGA+ 1680x1050, 8x DVD +/-, integrated webcam, oven mitts (pair)

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ The No. 1 LAN party lappy
- ✓ Self-contained
- ✗ Keyboard, weight
- ✗ Wouldn't run 3DMark05

79

The pickled onion
Monster Munch
of laptops

TINY.COM PCI-X 6800

■ Price: £1,250 | Manufacturer: Tiny.com | Phone: 08708 303156
www.tiny.com

Fast and affordable, but you try buying it...

THE MACHINE you see here turned up for testing some months ago complete with BenQ LCD and speakers, but for one reason or another the review never made it to print. I've only recently brushed the dust from the case for the photo and have rerun all our benchmarks, so if you're one of those who claim Tiny.com systems explode moments after delivery, here's conclusive proof they don't.

Generally speaking, Tiny.com PCs are pretty mundane affairs, with ho-hum videocards and not much grunt in games – something your parents keep in their spare

room on a 'computer desk' with a pull-out drawer for the keyboard. But because you're not old like them, you can visit the Ibuild area of Tiny's site and configure a real beast with the same savings – it's hard to believe that what you see here is cutting-edge for games and includes a 19-inch flat panel and speakers, yet is just £1,250.

SPECIFICATION

Desktop consisting of: Pentium 4 550 (3.4GHz), 256MB GeForce 6800 Ultra, 5.1 Audio and speakers, 1GB PC3200 RAM, 200GB HDD, 19-inch TFT, 16x DVD +/-, magnifying glass

The PCI-X 6800 is an amazing value system, and there's nothing I can find to suggest it'll go wrong. However, make sure you're familiar with the small print and have a recovery CD and the right support package in case it does.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fast and reliable
- ✓ Low price, all-inclusive
- ✗ The small print
- ✗ Some evidence of corner-cutting

82

The value king

BRIGANTINE

■ Price: £1,999 | Manufacturer: Lan Pirates | Phone: 01926 745609 | www.lan-pirates.co.uk

Here's why Blackbeard lusted after treasure and shouted a lot

THE Brigantine is what I'd build given free rein: the K8N from our Buyer's Guide, an Athlon 64 FX-55, two 512MB sticks of Ballistix RAM, a 6800 Ultra and a couple of fat-boy Barracudas in RAID configuration, all stuffed into an Apple-like aluminium case with neat carry handles and Tagan power supply. You also get Windows XP Pro and our favourite MX510 rodent swinging from one of the USB ports. In fact, there are only two things I'd change – I'd reconfigure the two Barracudas as RAID-1, because I'm old and sensible, and I'd replace the Lan Pirates badge with a small picture of Brian Blessed, because it's loud.

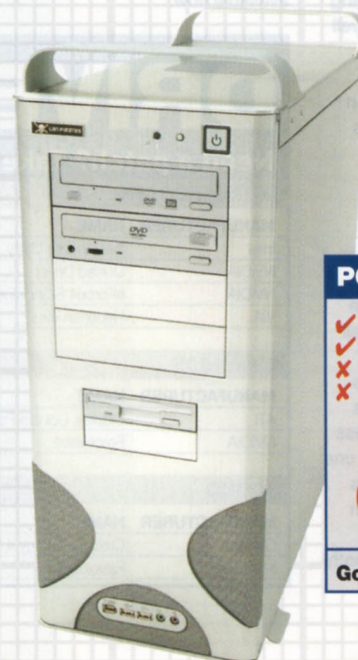
But not only is it nearly the tech spec of my dreams, it's also fast. The Brigantine was quicker than the Pyro 64-SLI in *Unreal Tournament 2004* and *Far Cry*, second to it in *Doom 3*, and was but a whisker from 13,000 marks in 3DMark03.

You might get only £1 change from two grand, but in terms of price and all-important performance, the system has a Wandymark

score little different from any of the monsters here, and when you consider that a retail FX-55 will set you back at least £600, it isn't that much of a stretch. The only thing to consider is that there's no screen included, so that's an added extra.

SPECIFICATION

Desktop consisting of: AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 (2.6GHz), 256MB GeForce 6800 Ultra, 7.1 Audio, 1GB PC3200 RAM, 500GB RAID-0, 16x DVD +/-, 70cl bottle Capt Morgan



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Everyone loves an FX-55
- ✓ Top-quality build and kit
- ✗ No monitor
- ✗ You'll need a loan

86

Gordon's alive!

MAXX4DV ATHLON 64 4000+

■ Price: £1,699 | Manufacturer: Special Reserve | Phone: 0870 7259 999 | www.maxxpc.com

A decent price for a decent bundle

CLIMB MY loft ladder and you'll enter the forgotten world of Wandy – mountains of magazines in boxes lying perilously close to the hatch where I've not been arsed to go up and put them away properly. It was in rummaging through these 'archives' that I discovered an old review of the MAXX4DV P4 3000 (issue 134, 91 per cent), a gaming rig costing £1,799 and capable of 5,792 in 3DMark03 – a respectable score back in the day.

Two years on, and today's MAXX4DV comes with a 64-bit AMD chip, twice the RAM, double the hard drive space, a TV tuner plus a Digate screen both larger

and faster than the old Prophetview. It gets close to 12,000 in 3DMark03 and yet is £100 cheaper. How's that for progress?

As before, the MAXX4DV is the most rounded package on test and is bursting at the seams with gaming goodness – the 4000+ chip delivers ample oomph, the 19-inch screen looks a bit frumpy but

is decent and quick, the 2GB RAM is way more than you'll ever need, and it even comes with an original, hologram Windows XP Pro disc for when it all goes wrong. Which mine did. But that's today's technology for you.

SPECIFICATION

Desktop consisting of: AMD Athlon 64 4000+ (2.4GHz), 256MB GeForce 6800 GT, 7.1 Audigy2 and speakers, TV Tuner, 2GB PC3200 RAM, 250GB HDD, 16x DVD +/-, 19-inch LCD (16ms), Kitchen sink

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great value, super bundle
- ✓ All that lovely RAM
- ✗ Low street cred
- ✗ Mine was wobbly

90

Consummate all-rounder

PYRO 64-SLI

■ Price: £2,252 | Manufacturer: Wired2Fire | Phone: 01737 247548 | www.wired2fire.co.uk

Weeeeeeeeeeeee, ooooooh, shiiiiiii, blimey...

STRIKE ME pink, this thing's in a hurry. I've not seen many systems hit 120fps in the Source test, so the Pyro's 165fps score was a real blow out of the water. It also shot beyond 20,000 in 3DMark03 and managed to thrash out 10,000 in 3DMark05 without the need for BIOS visits or winding up the video clocks. Heaven knows what numbers it'll come up with when you do.

Of course, we're talking a peachy-keen processor, dual hotsy-totsy videocards and a price tag to terrify the most extravagant spendthrift. Everything about the thing is over the top, and nothing

more obviously than the Thermaltake Xaser V case – given the choice, I'd opt for a smaller, less showy enclosure that doesn't have the manufacturer's name plastered all over the front panel in eleven (count 'em) different places. The Xaser might be great for cooling/modding freaks, with six fan control knobs, plus digital rpm and temperature

readouts, but it has too many sharp edges and isn't practical to cart about. Luckily, Wired2Fire allows you to configure a different one at buy time – Cooler Master's Wave Master or Centurion 5 would be my choice. But that's a minor complaint.

SPECIFICATION

Desktop consisting of: AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 (2.6GHz), 256MB GeForce 6800 Ultra x 2 (SLI), 7.1 Audio, 1GB PC3200 RAM, 200GB HDD, 16x DVD +/-, Small cushion for jaw

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ SLI really does work
- ✓ Fastest thing we've tested
- ✗ No monitor
- ✗ You can't afford it anyway

86

In short then, wow

XPS 3.6

■ Price: £1,949 | Man: Dell | Phone: 0870 1524 699 | www.dell.co.uk

Lacking in soul, but fast and solid nonetheless

LAST TIME the XPS was giving us a twirl on my workbench (issue 148, 79 per cent), it cost almost three grand and was on a par with a Burmese kitten for value. For more than twice the going rate, you had something that went 'meow', pounced on songbirds and shat in your neighbour's flowerbeds no different to any other mog. I do remember feeling guilty at having to discount the Dell's overall score, because it was a handsome,

beautifully-presented thing, and in all likelihood would never have let you down whether you used it for games or applications, but the giddy price meant that things didn't add up.

Now it's back with a bit more for much less, and for the first time you can order your Dell sans monitor (although it costs nothing to add its crappy 19-inch CRT which you can flog on eBay for £40). The benchmark results are majestic, in many cases second only to the

tearaway Pyro 64-SLI, and the quality is absolutely faultless both inside and out. It's just a shame you can't order one with an Athlon 64, because truth be told, if it were available with an FX-55, I'd have one myself.

SPECIFICATION

Desktop consisting of: Pentium 4 560 (3.6GHz), 256MB RADEON X850 XT Platinum, 7.1 Audigy2 ZS, 1GB PC3200 RAM, 465GB RAID-0, 16x DVD +/-, FCUK golfing trousers



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Flawless design and build
- ✓ Warranty and backup
- ✓ Still a touch pricey
- ✗ Limited configuration

84

Your very own desktop Lexus

ROCKDIRECT XTREME TI 3.6

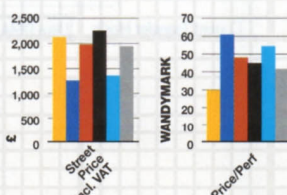
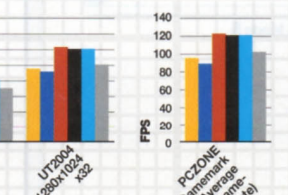
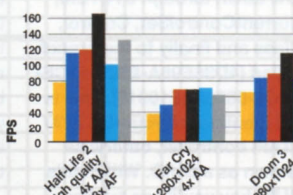
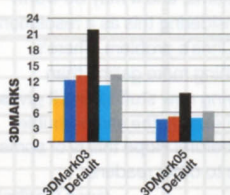
TINY PCI-X 6800

LAN PIRATES BRIGANTINE

WIRED2FIRE PYRO 64-SLI

SPECIAL RESERVE MAXX4DV

DELL XPS 3.6



The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK™** is the combined average score divided by the price.



DEAR WANDY

He may not have a time machine or Billie Piper at his beck and call, but in his own small way, every month rain or shine, Wendy does his bit to make the world a better place. We salute him...

■ TIME LARD: Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wendy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wendy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wendy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

If you're stuck using PIO rather than DMA, your machine can feel pretty sluggish.

DOWNLOADS SYNDROME

Q I have a Medion 3200+ Athlon and my machine is running somewhat on the slow side. I've tried defragging the disks but to no avail. I've also gone out and bought System Mechanic from iolo technologies and have cleaned up my system, but still the PC takes what feels like an eternity to boot up, and even longer before I can start using it.

I've heard there's a conflict with the Athlon and Windows XP Service Pack 2, but I've checked the AMD website and can see nothing. My problems stem from a full system restore I had to do at Christmas. I've installed all the correct software and have updated my graphics drivers, but I'm not able to speed things up. Have you any ideas to help?

Roy Tams

A Assuming your machine is properly cooled, that you've tried the default settings in your BIOS and haven't mucked about with

frequencies or timings, and that you don't have unwelcome processes (viruses, Trojans, whatever) gleefully humping your Athlon, I reckon your primary hard drive is stuck using PIO mode. This is a supremely reliable but CPU-intensive method of transferring data to and from the disk, but it's only a fallback and you should be using DMA or Ultra DMA instead. These two remove the load from your processor and will make your PC feel like new again.

Open the Device Manager by pressing WinKey+Break and selecting the Hardware tab. Open the IDE/ATA node on the tree, double-click the primary channel and then select the Advanced tab. If the transfer mode is set to PIO, choose the DMA option, click OK and then reboot. While we're here, and although it's unlikely, your system's BIOS may have a setting somewhere disabling DMA on your primary IDE channel, so now's the time to check.

If you're still stuck with PIO mode after the reboot, it's a sign that Windows has purposefully disabled DMA after errors during data transfers to the drive and you'll need to turn it back on manually. This involves the registry, so triple-strength undies at the ready.

Click the Start button, hit Run and type 'regedit' in the edit box. Open the HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE node, then drill down through SYSTEM, CurrentControlSet, Control, Class and finally to the branch called {4D36E96A-E325-11CE-BFC1-08002BE10318}. This is the identifier of your IDE ATA/ATAPI controller, otherwise known as a GUID. Within this GUID key you'll see subkeys 0000, 0001 and so on, referring to the drives attached to your controller.

Click on them in turn, and in the right-hand pane select and delete the entries called MasterIdDataChecksum and SlaveIdDataChecksum. Reboot and Windows will 'relearn' the DMA capabilities for each device you edited. After that, you should be cooking with gas again.

For a brief rant on defragging during emergencies, see 'Frag Grenade', right.

CLOCKING OFF

Q Further to the memory error plaguing Chris Roffe in *Men Of Valor* (issue 154), I was getting the same error in *Half-Life 2* and *Counter-Strike: Source*. I was using 1GB of generic PC3200 RAM with an ASUS A7N8X v2.0 motherboard, Athlon 2800XP processor and a LeadTek 5900LX graphics card.

The system was overclocked very slightly with a 175MHz FSB, and it worked fine in absolutely everything but *Source*. I thought it was the RAM, as it sometimes failed Memtest86, and so I bought 1GB of Elxir PC3200 memory to replace the generic stuff. I also acquired a 3200XP chip and proceeded to run the memory at 210MHz.

Again, fine in everything else, but guess what – the same old memory error in *Source*. I tried throttling back the overclock to 205MHz and relaxing the memory timings to 8-3-3 and... Bingo! No more problems.

It seems that *Half-Life 2* simply doesn't like overclocked systems, and it may be worth considering this as a resolution to Chris's problem. There's nothing more galling than buying new stuff to find it gives you exactly the same trouble as before! Hope this is of some use to other readers.

Jason Godbold

A Like you, Chris was using an Athlon-based PC. And

as you're well aware, with Athlon ownership comes an increased likelihood of non-standard clock settings and crazy experiments in the BIOS. AMD systems has always encouraged you to tickle and tweak them, and with so many websites and forums devoted to the art of overclocking, it's almost a given that Athlon users won't be running standard anything.

There was no mention of it in his email, but if what you've said about *Half-Life 2* is also true of *Men Of Valor*, Chris may like to wind down his system to its default settings and try again. I'm not overly hopeful, as the problems with the game seem to be across the board, but thanks for the suggestion. If it doesn't help Chris, it may well help out a beleaguered *Counter-Striker*.

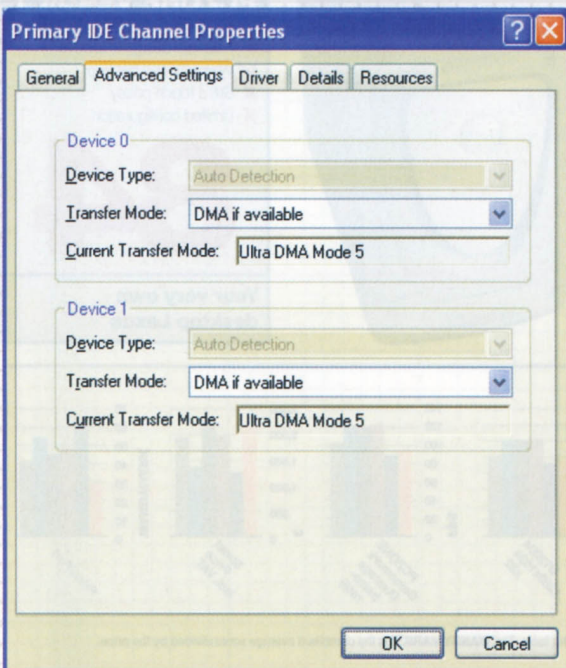
SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Q Having recently upgraded the main components in my machine, I decided it was time for a new graphics card. After much research and confusion with the different models and variations, I decided on an AGP GeForce 6600GT – should go nicely with my Athlon 2600+.

However, I was wondering if there's a big difference between the different card manufacturers? I was looking at the card provided by Dabs under its Dabsvalue brand. Do you or any of your readers know anything about this card, or have you had any problems with a particular brand? Can you trust any NVIDIA product on the market?

Tha Wah Yau

A Testing for reviews over several years has revealed that manufacturers are mostly the same. Yes, there are benchmark variations, but no, you'd not be able to tell the cards apart if you were to be shown them all running at once on



"If you're looking to clock the crap out of your hardware, you're always better off spending some time doing your research"

identical PCs. On occasion, and as strange as it seems, the variations between two different 6600GT have been less than variations between two 6600GTs from the same company. So buy whatever bundle suits your wallet best.

That said, if you're looking to clock the living crap out of your hardware, and I know a lot of you are these days, you're always best off spending a little more time doing your research. So, compare photos of cards, and look for decent-sized heat sinks for example, and a spend a bit more cash buying the right gear.

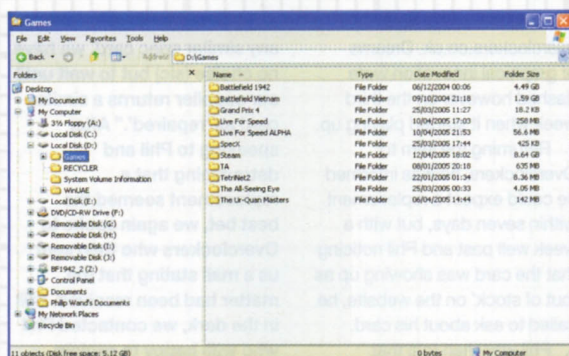
Check out overclocking forums for some buying advice, or opt for the BFG OC, GIGABYTE Turbo Force or Leadtek Extreme ranges, all of which come tweaked from the factory.

SIZE MATTERS

Q Can I pick your brain for a second? I feel a bit silly asking, but I can't for the life of me figure out how to calculate and show the folder sizes in Windows XP Explorer. Help!

Phil

A There's no checkbox or radio button, hidden or otherwise, to make folder sizes appear in any standard Windows Explorer. The reason is that, to calculate the cumulative size of all folders



A freeware add-in for Windows Explorer, Foldersize puts an extra column in the display showing recursive directory sizes.

and subfolders, plus all the subfolders beneath would slow the display down. But there are several fairly easy ways around this.

The first is to do it the old-fashioned way, which involves right-clicking on the folder in question and choosing Properties from the menu that appears. If it's at the top of a fairly complex hierarchy of files, you'll have to wait while Windows has a rummage and the number creeps up.

This isn't a very elegant solution, and a better one is to download a tiny freeware extension which does the same calculations in the background transparently. Once finished, it displays the results in the appropriate slot in Explorer. Download it from foldersize.sourceforge.net.

Once installed, right-click any column in the Explorer

pane and select Folder Size – if you have a decent spec machine, the delay is barely noticeable with this.

Alternatively, you can also use a tool like Sean Werkema's SpaceMonger. Although this doesn't integrate with Explorer, it's a whole lot more useful. You run it whenever you're feeling a bit short on elbow room, or when you fancy a bit of a tidy-up. What it does is present your entire hard drive and all the files as a graphical map, enabling you to see exactly which folders are the bloaters. It's simple and it's free. Download it from www.werkema.com.

OUT OF SYNCH

Q I recently upgraded from an Athlon 2800+ to a 3200+ to take advantage of the 400MHz FSB. My other system specs are an MSI K7N2 Delta, a RADEON 9800 PRO and 1GB PC2700 RAM. My problem is that when my friend put the same 3200+ into an identical motherboard with PC2700 RAM, the dual-channel controller stopped working. This did not occur immediately, so I'm worried that the same will happen to mine.

My question is whether this happened due to running 333MHz RAM with a 400MHz FSB processor, or did my friend fry his Northbridge? The reason

FRAG GRENADE

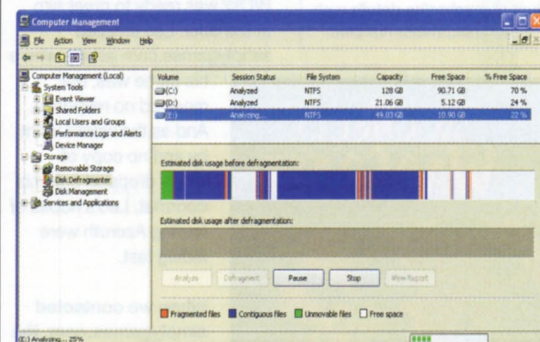
WHEN STUFF GOES WRONG, DEFRAGGING IS OFTEN THE FIRST THING PEOPLE TURN TO. BUT SHOULD YOU BE DOING THIS AT ALL?

Running a defrag utility on your hard disk causes the files to be rearranged into adjacent lumps of data, the theory being that stuff can be pulled out much faster when it's not spread about the drive like syringes on Conwy beach. Older systems with beige cases and FAT32 hard drives will benefit from it once in a while, but there's little chance that running defrag on a modern XP machine will make any noticeable difference.

In fact, I'd go as far as to say that if anyone is able to step forward and tell a fragmented NTFS file system from a freshly defragmented one simply by rebooting it, I will buy 35,000 Volkswagens, fly them all to the moon, then park them next to each other to form the word 'bollocks' in the Sea of Tranquility.

Predictive caching techniques and other look-ahead algorithms inside XP mean that, for almost every home user out there, the various peculiarities and inefficiencies of the underlying file system are hidden from them. Therefore, the nanoseconds you might gain from running a defrag are dwarfed by the several hours it takes to do the job. Silly, really. Not only that, but reordering every file on your drive when your machine is behaving strangely can, in many cases, cause a lot more problems than it fixes – if the ship starts sinking, would you rearrange the deckchairs or steer for dry land?

While it remains a useful means of keeping your files together in the event you need to resurrect them after a disk failure, and while it's known to improve the efficiency of the Windows page file, it's mostly nonsense. Run it occasionally for the reasons just given, but for performance issues such as the one Roy Tams describes (see opposite), it's of little use.



Machine acting all funny? This won't help you.

I ask is because back in issue 143 you stated that the Northbridge can get toasty and lead to instability. Could the same be true for the dual-channel controller? It's my intention to upgrade to 400MHz PC3200 RAM, but in the meantime, what do you recommend?

Alison Plevin-Gustar

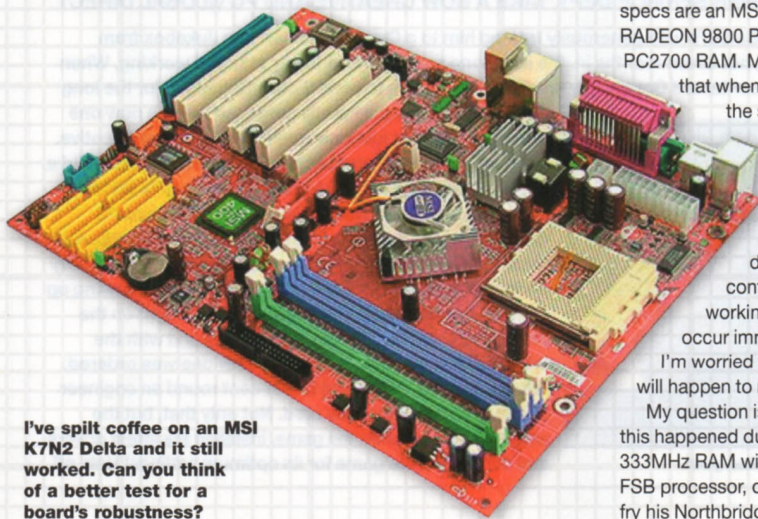
A My experience of nForce2 boards is that they perform significantly worse when run asynchronously (in other words, when the front-side bus and memory aren't beating the same tempo).

You could simply slot your new 400MHz FSB processor into the motherboard system and run it with the 333MHz RAM, but I wouldn't advise it – not because it'll break anything on your K7N2 board, but because matching the two clocks is faster and proper.

The first and safest option is to underclock the 400MHz of your Athlon to match the 333MHz of your PC2700 memory. In the Advanced Chipset Features of the BIOS, drop the FSB from 200MHz to 166MHz and ensure your FSB/DRAM ratio is at the default value of 'Auto'. That way, both the FSB and the RAM will be made to run synchronously with each other at 166MHz.

You've probably worked it out already, but the other option is to overclock the memory to 200MHz in order to meet the standard FSB of the processor. This depends on the quality of your RAM and may well ruin the stability of your games and applications, so unless you have to have the benefit of the 3200+ bus speed right now, I'd wait until you buy PC3200 RAM. [W]

Visit Wendy on the Web at www.dearwendy.com



I've spilt coffee on an MSI K7N2 Delta and it still worked. Can you think of a better test for a board's robustness?



WATCHDOG

With some companies it's easy: you buy something, you love it, they love you.
With some though, it's not always that simple and the love takes a little longer...

■ **BLONDE AMBITION** Suzy Wallace

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, why not drop us a line?

WRITE TO Watchdog, **PC ZONE**, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.
EMAIL Alternatively, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'.

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please send us your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

WOES OF WARCRAFT

While sampling the delights of *StarCraft* and *Warcraft III*, Leo Powis decided to give the all-conquering *World Of Warcraft* a go. So off he trotted to simplygames.com, where he made his order and sat back to await the arrival of Blizzard's latest and greatest. Press releases were hoarded, details were pored over and a race and initial profession were decided upon for the big moment.

The status of the order soon showed as 'despatched', but when he returned home from boarding school, no copy of *WOW* was ready to greet him at the door. Leo emailed simplygames.com asking where

his game was, but received no response. And as the weeks went by and no copy of *WOW* dropped onto his doormat, Leo's hopes of touring Azeroth were fading fast.

When we contacted simplygames.com, the company explained: "The game was dispatched on Feb 15. We have had no emails from Mr Powis, otherwise we would have arranged a replacement." Ah, so it appears the phantom *World Of Warcraft*-stealing postman from

issue 153 has struck again. Simplygames.com did go on to say that it had spoken to Leo and said a replacement will be shipped once it received new stocks. So no apology on offer, but we hope Leo's got that replacement by now so that he can join the rest of the world in getting drunk and naked in Ogrimmar.

BELATED CARD

Like every PC gamer, Phil Mundell wanted more from his computer. With a graphics card being the obvious solution, he ordered himself a shiny new Powercolor X800XTPE from

overclockers.co.uk. Dreams of graphical innovation were dashed however on the third week when it started playing up.

Returning the item to Overclockers, he was informed he could expect a replacement within seven days, but with a week well past and Phil noticing that the card was showing up as 'out of stock' on the website, he called to ask about his card.

Phil was then told that "as the hardware had been returned after a period of 28 days it was to be returned to the manufacturer for a warranty replacement". Knowing that his warranty was with Overclockers, Phil complained to the MD but his complaint didn't seem to receive top priority. With a now unusable computer, his last contact with Overclockers was to request that a replacement be sent out within five days.

Watchdog got in contact with Overclockers and passed on Phil's information. The company stated: "The card was confirmed to be faulty (sic) and a note was made to issue a replacement or to wait for a replacement from our supplier. As we do not have this card in stock, or in fact

any similar spec card, we have no choice (sic) but to wait until our supplier returns a similar card as 'repaired'." After speaking to Phil and determining that a replacement seemed the best bet, we again spoke to Overclockers who then sent us a mail stating that the matter had been resolved. Still in the dark, we contacted Phil who was happy to explain. "OCUK has just offered me a replacement that will arrive tomorrow." Happy days.

MAG FOR IT

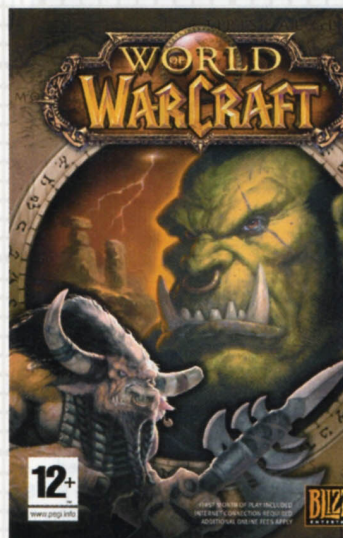
We're well aware of the essentials in life – food, water, *PC ZONE*. So when devoted reader Graham Anderson contacted us with some problems he'd had while renewing his *ZONE* subscription, we were all ears. As he'd subscribed at the beginning of March, he was aware that he'd miss out on issue 153, so off he popped to his local shops to pick up a copy. Worried that he might miss out on issue 154 as well, he emailed subscriptions several times but was happily informed that it would be sent as his first subs issue. Unfortunately, the hallowed on



PC ZONE: most wanted.

sale date came and went, and Graham still had no *ZONE*.

Watchdog instantly got on the phone to the subscriptions hotline to see what they had to say. Despite Graham being told otherwise, due to his payment not actually clearing until mid-March, this was apparently too late to add him to the already crammed mailing list for that month. The department has confirmed that Graham's subscription will start at issue 155, but Watchdog just can't bear to see a devoted reader have to suffer a whole month without *ZONE*, so we've popped a copy of the May DVD issue in the post. Enjoy. [X]



It's quite popular you know.

THE ACCUSED

Simply Games
At the heart of gaming...



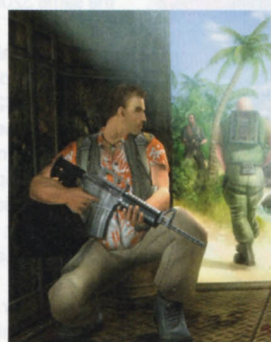
PCZONE
SUBSCRIPTIONS

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ **NOT ONE BUT TWO COMPANIES THIS MONTH HAVE EXCELLED IN THE CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPT. TAKE A BOW CREATIVE AND PC GLOBAL DIRECT**

Richard Carbin's wife generously treated him to a Creative Nomad Zen Jukebox from America, but seven months in, the earphone socket mysteriously stopped working. When Richard contacted Creative by email, it advised him to send it over. Settling in for the long



▼ **He's behind you!**

haul, Richard was pleasantly surprised when a new one arrived in the post just one week later! Nice one Creative.

Meanwhile, after starting on a college course to build a PC, Neil Jary decided to go home-grown and build his own computer. He ordered the components from PC Global Direct and got down and dirty building his PC. But when he came to sampling the tropical delights of *Far Cry* on the finished product, the computer started throwing up some major graphical glitches. Neil got straight on the phone to PC Global Direct's technicians and with the video card as the main suspect, a new one was ordered. When it arrived, PC Global Direct sent round an engineer to install and test the new card. Not only that, but the engineer also patched the game, installed the latest drivers and configured the game for its optimum settings! Hats off.

PLAY NEW XBOX GAMES WITH EVERY ISSUE OF Official **XBOX** Magazine



See Xbox 360
and the launch
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XBOX 360.

THE CONSOLE!

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THE GAMES!

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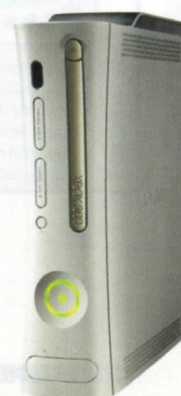


Everything you need to know about Xbox 360! The console, the games, the launch!

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- ➔ CT Special Forces
- ➔ Xbox Live Arcade



BUYER'S GUIDE

Fancy a new bit of kit but not sure what to buy? Fear not my friend – grab my hand and take the leap...

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product

that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great

product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

MOTHERBOARDS



A8V DELUXE WIRELESS

STREET PRICE £82
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK
TELEPHONE 0870 1208 340
WEBSITE uk.asus.com

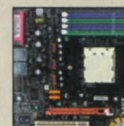
For the first time, an AMD board takes gold. Based on the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the ASUS A8V supports 939-pin Athlon 64 and FX processors (the engines behind the best gaming systems), and up to 4GB of dual-channel PC3 200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.



KN1 EXTREME

STREET PRICE £96
MANUFACTURER ECS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.ecs.uk.com

One of the cheaper nForce4 Ultra boards, the KN1 Extreme offers all the benefits of expensive 939-pin AMD64 mobos for under a ton. As well as two integrated cooling fans, the KN1 features ten USB ports, support for six SATA devices, RAID, onboard audio and an external USB-based 802.11g wireless adaptor. ECS is known for good value and this is no exception. Also, overclocking features have been added in BIOS updates.



K8N NEO2 PLATINUM

STREET PRICE £88
MANUFACTURER Micro-Star
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

MSI's K8N Neo has always boasted stability and performance, and the new 939-pin, nForce3 Ultra variant is just as impressive. The Neo2 supports the new Athlon 64 and FX-53 processors and incorporates a dual-channel memory controller. The board includes 7.1 sound, Gigabit LAN, 8 USB 2.0 ports, 2 x ATA and 4 x SATA connectors. Multi-function RAID is also standard.

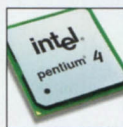
PROCESSORS



ATHLON 64 3500

STREET PRICE £174
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Now the 939-pin chips no longer require registered memory, the AMD64 route is a cheaper option. Smash open your old Pentium PC, snatch the PC3200 sticks from its banks and mate them with a new Athlon on an A8V Deluxe. Although the Hyper-Threading alternatives can be better for business and encoding apps, the 64-bit chips are great for gaming, the 3500 giving best value. Die-hard Intel fans are missing out.



P4 3.2GHZ

STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

If you're desperate for an Intel-inside, the 3.2GHz still packs a hefty punch. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.



ATHLON 64 4000+

STREET PRICE £346
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Although the FX-55 is AMD's hottest tamale, it's more expensive than the 939-pin, 2.4GHz, ClawHammer-based Athlon 64 4000+ chip. And if you're thinking those specs look oddly familiar, full marks: the 4000+ is a rebadged FX-53 with its price shaved by £50, making it the slightly saner choice. Mind you, if you're looking to spend this kind of money, finding the extra nifty for the full-on FX-55 might not be an issue...

HDDS



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £51
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £36
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you can jump up a size. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £73
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARDS



GEFORCE 6800 GT

STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics
TELEPHONE 01327 315750
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk

The release of *Doom 3* means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its über-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.



GV-NX66T128VP TURBO FORCE

STREET PRICE £131
MANUFACTURER GIGABYTE
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE uk.giga-byte.com

A fanless heat-pipe arrangement keeps this GeForce cool and silent. GIGABYTE claims a 38% speed hike over a regular card – not quite, but the boost is noticeable – it's the fastest 6600GT we've tested. *Thief: Deadly Shadows* and *Joint Ops: Typhoon Rising* come bundled, and the card has full VIVO capabilities – PowerDirector comes free. A stunning card at a stunning price.



RADEON X700 PRO 256MB

STREET PRICE £130
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE www.saphiretech.com

Hot on the heels of the 6600GT is Sapphire's X700 Pro, featuring PCI-Express, GDDR-3 memory, 8 pixel pipelines and a 128-bit interface. It's a quality product bundled with quality games, and in benchmarks has no trouble keeping up with the runaway GeForce. Unlike the 6600GT, there's no AGP counterpart and it's more money. But if you're looking for a RADEON and maximum mainstream grunt, this is the card for you.

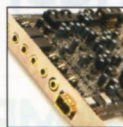
SOUNDCARDS



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.



AUDIGY 2 ZS

STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.



AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO

STREET PRICE £170
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX510

STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0217
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The best example of the MX optical engine, the MX510 is ideal for gaming. Logitech has upped the ante of the MX500's image processing from 4.7 megapixels per second to 5.8, meaning greater accuracy and smoother movements. It's also increased acceleration from 10g to 15g, meaning lag-free responses. The scroll wheel is nicely ratcheted and although it's heavier than the slimline MX310, it's well balanced for quick movements in FPSs.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £17
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse and have fond memories of a time when three-clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus, the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700

STREET PRICE £40
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

WAS £47
NOW £40

MICE



PC GAMING KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £35
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com/uk

A simple yet elegant design, with variable backlit keys and peerless build quality make the PC Gaming Keyboard a very desirable object. The keys are weighted perfectly and are ideal for late-night gaming because they hardly make a sound. Rubber pads stop the thing sliding away from you, and the silver Saitek comes with a programmable command pad which can be positioned to both suit lefties and righties. Finger heaven.



INTERNET NAVIGATOR

STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and feel nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the Web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARDS



CYBORG EVO

STREET PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, with the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price, you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICKS



INSPIRE P580 5.1

STREET PRICE £56
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space – and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six-speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too.



Z-640

STREET PRICE £58
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – if you're a basshead, you'll love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

STREET PRICE £180
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that make you leap out of your seat.

WAS £180
NOW £175

SPEAKERS



VP171S

STREET PRICE £245
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
TELEPHONE 01293 643900
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

With a response time of 8ms and both DVI and analog inputs, this ViewSonic LCD was always going to be best suited to gamers. Images are sharp and richly saturated, with a huge range of contrast and brightness. A thin bezel makes it ideal for multi-monitor setups. Height adjust, tilt, swivel and even pivot means the 17-inch screen can be put anywhere and made to suit anyone. The only problem is the fiddly buttons on the front.



FLATRON L1730P

STREET PRICE £355
MANUFACTURER LG
TELEPHONE 0870 585000
WEBSITE uk.lg.com

If you're after speed, quality and features, the 17-inch Flatron L1730P is the one to covet. It boasts a 12ms response time, has an amazing picture, a range of colour presets, detachable two-port USB hub and is TCO-03 compliant to boot. This accreditation means there's height and tilt adjust, plus the screen is lit uniformly – it's noticeably a superior image. The only drawback is the price, and the pivot feature won't interest gamers.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £425
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22-inch Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz – and so ideal for gaming.

WAS £398
NOW £425

SCREENS



ICEMAT SIBERIA MULTI HEADSET

STREET PRICE £69
MANUFACTURER Soft Trading ApS
TELEPHONE 00 4570 250 075
WEBSITE www.icemat.com

A beguiling combination of modern chic, excellent sound reproduction and the integration of a top-quality microphone propel these headphones to the top of the pile. You can buy a lot cheaper, but if you want to look like an old-school astronaut and play games in absolute comfort, you won't find a better pair without travelling to distant planets far, far away.



EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET

STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback – and at this price, it's a steal.



HS300

STREET PRICE £11
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE europe.creative.com

Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering if you're after a new pair of headphones on a budget. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message still comes across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these.

WAS £15
NOW £20

HEADSETS



MAILBOX

EMAIL YOUR RANTS TO
MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

With Woods away, the acting editor will play...

■ GAMES TIPSTER Jamie Sefton



What a scorcher!

TOP TEN

You know you're a good gamer if:

- 1) You know your weapon load-out before you turn your PC on.
- 2) You discuss Counter-Strike tactics in your sleep.
- 3) You subscribe to PC ZONE.
- 4) You've stolen the W, A, S, D and R keys from your office keyboard because you wore yours out.
- 5) You can drink tea without spilling it on your keyboard while killing mercs/aliens/cops/armies.
- 6) There's never any problem

when a friend asks to borrow a game because you've already finished them anyway.

- 7) You're always the one with the flag.
- 8) You have friction burns on your mouse mat.
- 9) Your vehicle is always the most popular.
- 10) You can understand what people mean when they use ultra-short abbreviations.

Joe Harris

I have a number 11 – you have a small silver cup on top of your PC after beating Dave Woods in the Pro Evo office final. Life is good.

HARD AS NAILS

I've just read the 'When Gamers Go Bad' letter in Mailbox (issue 154), and I'm disappointed that people are complaining about games being too hard. In my opinion, games are getting a lot easier, and (even worse), shorter! Compared to older games, the only improvement is graphics. The original *Command & Conquer* took me months to complete and I even had to replay one of the storylines



Half-Life: much more of a challenge than the sequel?

because one of the missions was too difficult.

I admit that *Half-Life 2* is a great game, but the original wipes the floor with it; better storyline, more depth and length to the game and more of a challenge. The only things *Half-Life 2* does better are graphics and physics – but I caned it in a weekend.

Patrick Willis

Thank f*** games are getting easier – at least we have difficulty settings and quicksaves nowadays. However, our Will has been replaying *Half-Life 2* on 'Hard' and reckons it's much more of a challenge. Failing that, just attempt *Far Cry* on 'Easy'...

CANNOT COMPUTE

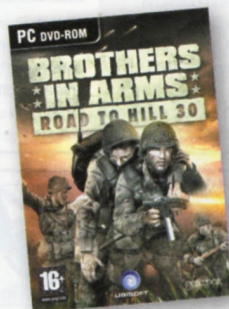
Just once, I'd like to come across an error message that actually contains useful intelligible information pointing to a possible solution. I've been unable to run the last two PC ZONE DVDs, which was explained to me by this rather useless error message: "DIRECTOR PLAYER ERROR – This application requires an Xtra() that either does not exist or failed to initialise properly. Please make sure the appropriate Xtras

are in the Xtras folder."

Where am I supposed to find this mysterious Xtra and if it doesn't exist, what then? That's of no use to me! It's not working because of what? I'm off to have a lie down to recover from this rant. If I'm not back in ten minutes, please insert an Xtra in my Xtras folder and initialise...

Derek Brown

I know exactly what you mean, Derek. Maybe Microsoft could extend the use of that ever-so-friendly, smiling paper-clip from Word to assist us in our darkest hours? "Hi there! Gee, are you having trouble running Steam? Bummer. Maybe I could help you with that!" That would be perfect.



Brothers In Arms artwork: done by a seven-year-old?

NATURAL BORN CRITIC

I got that *Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30* the other day from Tesco. A good game on the whole, but I've got one major concern: who the f*** did the artwork for the front

BANNED!

In a bid to make these pages even more exciting, we're flexing our dictatorial muscle and exorcising certain dead topics. Write to us about these things and we won't print your letter, and we definitely won't send you a graphics card. You have been warned...

- Requests for tips on games. Try looking at www.gamefaqs.com
- Which is better – *Far Cry* or *Half-Life 2*?
- Did you really sack Woods for libelling Sefton in the mag?

cover? It's appalling, like a seven-year-old did it – in fact, it wouldn't look out of place on *Take Hart's 'The Gallery'* off the telly a good few years back. Give us a graphics card, go on.

Dibs

No.

BIGGEST FAN

Your letters page last month had the tagline: "Have you gone all soft"? Well, here's the softest yet – I just wanted to write and say thanks.

I'm working in a completely soul-sucking job at the moment and the only things getting me through every day are my consistent daydreams of making a headshot in *Counter-Strike: Source*, the utterly involving world of *Neverwinter Nights*, restarting *Half-Life 2*, creeping through a moonlit jungle in *Far Cry* and generally counting the hours until I can get back to the PC. I was also checking the newsagents every day for your magazine this month, like a desperate kid trying to steal porn from the distracted shop owner. I can't believe how much happier it makes me. Thanks to you all, but thanks the most to my long-suffering and eternally understanding girlfriend. The things you put up with...

Craig B

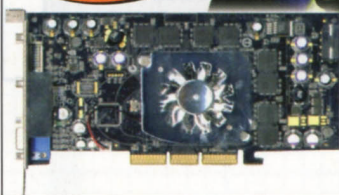
SEND US A LETTER AND WIN A TOP-OF-THE-RANGE GRAPHICS CARD

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, FUTURE PUBLISHING, 99 BAKER ST, LONDON, W1U 6FP OR MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The new XFX 5900 XT is one of the best graphics cards we've ever reviewed, with extreme overclocking, ludicrously fast memory and ultra cooling. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?



WIN!
A TOP
GRAPHICS
CARD



I'm a massive wanker!





"Hmmm, I'm sure there's a slight breeze coming from somewhere..."

Thanks Craig, we love you too. However, we're all getting just a bit scared now by you hanging outside the offices and following us home after work every night...

JACK ATTACK

Upon hearing the words *Far Cry 2*, I can't help but think at least one of these two things. First (and most common), will my PC be able to run it? Second, what would I like to see in the game? My imaginary list would look like this:

- 1) Co-op play over LAN or TCP/IP.
- 2) Giant Trigenes. I'm talking tree-stompers able to eat grunts whole!
- 3) The ability to set traps for enemies.
- 4) At least one type of tank.
- 5) Grunts being blown in half when caught in an explosion.

Does PC ZONE have anything it would like to add?

Jamie Anderson

First, the answer's probably not. Second, I'd be up for mega-gore, plus Ewok-style rolling log traps. We'll hopefully have some exciting Crytek/*Far Cry* news for you soon...

CALL ME

Upon playing *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*, I realised your comments about the improved script and humour were spot-on. But it's not the enemies' banter or Sam Fisher's flirty arguments with Grim about the fact that he's too old that made me smirk. Rather, it's colonel Irving Lambert's brilliantly blasphemous and melodramatically-acted catchphrases that made me laugh out loud.

Three of my favourites are: "Good God!", "Black Hell!" and "Sweet Jesus Fisher!" It made me think that ZONE should put its all-time favourite game character catchphrases on its shiny discs, so we can make prank phone calls by stringing the sentences together.

Rhodri Morgan

Great idea. Imagine the laughs you could have phoning your grandparents with the screams of a burning zombie from *Half-Life 2* ringing in their ears.

IN THE NAVY

Re: your Royal Navy challenge in issue 154, here's a photo of me on the high seas holding a copy of the premier PC games mag,



We wouldn't mess with Smiley.

while also getting a bit of real-life practise of *Call Of Duty*. Just read your preview of the Infinity Ward sequel – it'd make a cracking Christmas present if it releases on time.

Smiley 'Bluto' Miles

Well done Smiley. We'll sort out a decent prize, which will be specially airlifted to you by Future Publishing helicopter. Continuing the armed forces theme, we'll now give a prize to the first pilot in the RAF who sends us a photo of him or herself holding a copy of PC ZONE while simultaneously flying a fighter jet. The gauntlet has been laid down...

EURO NON-SCEPTIC

I was playing *Call Of Duty* multiplayer last night and it struck me how many Europeans were playing together on one server: British, Danish, Finnish,

BACKCHAT

Hollywood is remaking films relentlessly – but is there a case for the same to happen in the games industry? For the generation that missed them, should we remake classics with today's technology? Here are your comments from the forums at www.pczone.co.uk

Moomoocow8 believes that: "For a lot of older games, the rose-tinted spectacles play a large part. If *X-Wing* was to be remade now, would it be as revolutionary or as absorbing? I don't think it would. I'm all for a new *X-Wing* game with new ideas, but a straight remake of the original wouldn't sway many gamers." Fair enough, but **Original_aceman** reckons that it's well overdue for a remake of *Populous*: "Keep the same gameplay and layout, just upgrade the graphics and make it playable at resolutions bigger than 640x480. I don't know how I managed to play it so long on the old Sega Master System on a console control pad."

PawsofEvil, however, had a good old grumble about the kids today and their attitudes to games: "When I was a youngster, we never had any of this two-handed weapon multi-frag insta-gib BFG gun-toting violence in 128-trillion colours with a gazillion polygons per character and object. Nooooooooo. We had a command line, a 'look' command, and if you were really lucky, a '?' or 'help' command too. Remake all the text adventures I say, so they can learn to type with all their fingers instead of just the tip of their thumbs..." **Slackdog** agrees: "I'd settle for a decent point-and-click adventure – all this 3D gubbins confuses me."

Reverend_Joseph makes a good point about the remake scene. He reckons: "It's better suited to independent modding teams who'd develop the game purely out of love for the original, rather than in the interest of topping the charts." The final rather positive word goes to **Crow555**. "So long as developers aren't bullied by the publishers, not only will some excellent spins on classic ideas happen, but some innovative new concepts will sprout forth too – *Darwinia* for example." Hear hear. Oh, but if LucasArts is listening – how about *Sam & Max 2*?

LETTER OF THE MONTH

DO YOU KNOW THE WAY TO SAN ANDREAS?

While it seems much of the media likes to jump on the anti-games industry bandwagon these days, who looks at the other side of things? Not long ago, me and a mate found ourselves enjoying sunny Miami. Wanting to explore, we hired a car and went for a look around.

Unfortunately, the only map we had was a free one showing the location of every Burger King in the city – not very useful – and so half a tank of gas later, we found ourselves in the unenviable position of being two

English guys in a rented convertible lost in Little Haiti. Not the best neighbourhood.

Starting to get looks from guys clearly packing heat on street corners, we started to panic. Thankfully, my mind drifted back to those heady days of *GTA: Vice City* and before I knew it, I could see myself as Tommy Vercetti, cruising on my PCJ while listening to Fernando on Emotion 98.3. I suddenly knew which direction to head back to Ocean Beach (South Beach). The game isn't 100 per cent accurate, but it's damn close and worked for us. Thank you Rockstar.

Phil Towle

Reminds me of a similar experience the other week when I got terribly lost in a little place off the beaten track called Norrath. Have a free graphics card.



German, French, Dutch, Belgian and Italian. I suddenly got a warm, fluffy feeling – who says game-playing isolates you from other people?

There can't be many instances where so many Europeans gather together to take part in the same activity. Unless you count the European Parliament. Or cheap porn films.

Gavsky

Or the Eurovision Song Contest. We agree though – we have a sister mag PC ZONE Benelux, so we're always banging on about the value of closer European

integration. Plus, we can blag all-expenses-paid trips to Amsterdam.

TIPS MAG

Hello. Please could you tell me how to kill the Giant, the one who's immune to magic and normal weapons in the siege engine area in *Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal*?

Mr LJ Cadagan

Certainly Mr Cadagan. With monsters that have a spell-resistance of 90 per cent-plus, you need to back off and set traps

by... Oh sod it, I'm off to the pub. ☹



THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

HALF-LIFE 2



We always knew that somewhere within our PC there was the potential for absolute, outright brilliance – and now Valve's cracked it. *Half-Life 2* is a masterpiece, and a game that won't be trumped for a long, long time. Maybe not even until *Half-Life 3*. With physics, design, art and ambience to die for, this sequel builds on its Black Mesa roots with stunning aplomb. Gordon Freeman, we salute you.

PUB VU Games DEV Valve
PCZ ISSUE 148



FAR CRY

Far Cry may be several notches beneath *Half-Life 2*, but it remains an outstanding and exhilarating experience that pushes your rig and your nerves to their limits. The narrative may be iffy, but *Far Cry* is a cracking achievement.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140



DOOM 3

Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's still a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.

PUB Activision DEV id software
PCZ ISSUE 146



CALL OF DUTY

With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.

PUB Activision DEV Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Remedy
PCZ ISSUE 136



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.

PUB VU Games DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 147



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and it's genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV VU Games
PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Long in the tooth? Dated? Not one iota. The original *Half-Life* remains a touchstone for every shooter of recent years, and for good reason: it's fantastic, and remains so to this day. Play it again – the magic's still there.

PUB VU Games DEV Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the PC ZONE solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 138



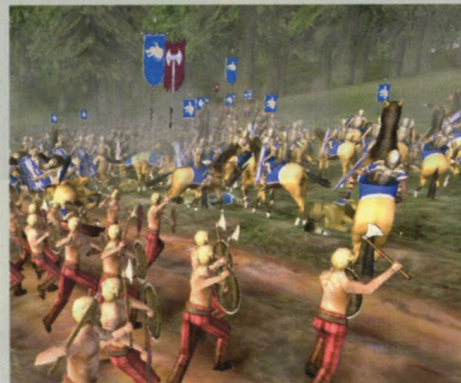
RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

A brutal and brilliant shooter that's infinitely better than Riddick's cinematic outing. It may have started out life on the Xbox, but that's no reason not to try out its own brand of violence and filth.

PUB VU Games DEV Starbreeze
PCZ ISSUE 150

STRATEGY

ROME: TOTAL WAR



An engine that makes grown men cry, AI so great that Hannibal could be in charge and a cinematic tinge that grabs your social life and will not let go. *Rome: Total War* is every inch the champion we knew it would be. A few rough edges appear occasionally, but this is strategy far above anything we've seen in *Medieval: Total War* or anywhere else. The greatest battle simulator ever.

PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 148



LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Melding the best of the hardcore and mainstream markets, this strategic gem combines intuitive gameplay with real-life tactics to create an epic, deeply entertaining experience that's dripping with atmosphere.

PUB EA DEV EA Pacific
PCZ ISSUE 149



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft DEV Big Huge Games
PCZ ISSUE 129



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.

PUB Codemasters DEV Best Way
PCZ ISSUE 144



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere. In addition, it boasts a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios
PCZ ISSUE 123



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

If you're looking for something that doesn't quite fit into the usual template, *Pirates!* is the game for you. With governor's daughters to dally with, trade routes to plunder and land to be lubbered, *Pirates!* is a winner.

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis
PCZ ISSUE 149



GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions, strat-fans should check it out.

PUB VU Games DEV Massive Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 143



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

An old school charmer with some cool visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation: what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.

PUB THQ DEV Relic
PCZ ISSUE 147



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision DEV Stainless Steel Studios
PCZ ISSUE 135



HEARTS OF IRON II

A supremely hardcore RTS with the trappings of *Risk*, this certainly isn't for the uninitiated or foolhardy. Functional graphics hide a deep, complex system of world conflict and politics – if you're clever enough that is.

PUB JoWood DEV Paradox
PCZ ISSUE 152

Want to know what's the best shooter, what's the top strategy game or what to play if you want to blow away your mates online? You've come to the right place – the **PC ZONE A-list**. Fresh impetus this month is provided by the castle-tastic **Stronghold 2** and the so-cute-it-hurts **Lego Star Wars...**

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that BioWare is one of the best development houses on the planet.

PUB Activision DEV BioWare
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively opened world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV BioWare
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorch of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES

Once you get past the bugs and glitches, *Bloodlines* is a deep, absorbing game that everyone with an interest in the genre should play. Great dialogue, clever plot and (despite the dodgy combat), a superb experience.

PUB Activision DEV Troika Games
PCZ ISSUE 150



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic award because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay DEV BioWare
PCZ ISSUE 96



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 137

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY



An amazing new rendition of Sam Fisher's oeuvre, now packaged not only with the excellent gruff mercs vs slinky spies multiplayer but also with a (strangely homoerotic) co-op mode where two players can join forces for some stealth rough 'n' tumble. The single-player remains brilliant as well, with Sam's moves and new-found knifework becoming so lithe and smooth he's apparently aging backwards. Great stuff.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 154



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
PCZ ISSUE 138



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

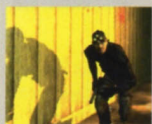
PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

He may have gone all moody on us in *Warrior Within*, but we still prefer the Prince's younger, more innocent days of *Sands Of Time*. Combat is iffy, granted, but there's a rare charm here that the sequel could not replicate.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 136



SPLINTER CELL

Three green lights on his head and (still) some of the best stealth missions available – not bettered by *Pandora Tomorrow* and only recently equalled by *Chaos Theory* – the original *Splinter Cell* is now so cheap it hurts.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



THE SUFFERING

A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.

PUB Midway DEV Surreal Software
PCZ ISSUE 145



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



LEGO STAR WARS

NEW ENTRY Relive the *Star Wars* prequels with the help of Danish model bricks. It's a barney concept that works brilliantly – until you realise you've whizzed through its entirety in a matter of hours.

PUB Eidos DEV Traveller's Tales
PCZ ISSUE 155

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



EVIL GENIUS

It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.

PUB VU Games DEV Elixir

PCZ ISSUE 147



THE SIMS 2

We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 147



STRONGHOLD 2

NEW ENTRY Packed with humour, depth, detail and replayability, this filth-ridden castle-constructing sim brings to mind the classic Bullfrog games of yore. Few games combine economy-building and battlefield action with such seamless panache.

PUB 2K Games DEV Firefly

PCZ ISSUE 155



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 135

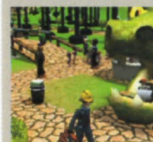


SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you busy for a fair while.

PUB Gathering DEV Firefly Studios

PCZ ISSUE 136

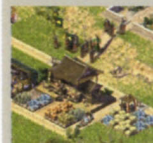


ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3

A stirring return for the ride-creating cash-cow that brings with it a snazzy 3D engine and more coasters than you can shake a stick at. It doesn't quite recall the *Theme Park* glory days, but *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* is the closest we've been in ages.

PUB Atari DEV Frontier Developments

PCZ ISSUE 149



EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 125

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST II



The best just got sooooo much better. As visually alluring as a lingerie-clad supermodel holding a giant meat pie, as full of content as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and as addictive as purple Fruit Pastilles topped with Pringles. Sony has learnt every lesson it could in the five years since the original and produced a MMOG that sets new standards across the board.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 150



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

The most popular PC game of all time according to reports, *World Of Warcraft* is the 'other' best MMOG ever. Less realistic and perhaps a touch more fun than *EQII*, it's horses for courses as to which one you choose. The only real difference is that *WoW* is PvP based.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 152



CITY OF HEROES

It may not have scored as high as the others in our review, but this spandex-wearing, justice-dispensing, superhero-themed MMOG has certainly won over the popular vote. Long-term appeal may be dubious, but for instant-action fun, it simply can't be beaten.

PUB NCsoft DEV Cryptic Studios

PCZ ISSUE 149



PLANETSIDE

The eternal war for Auraxis just keeps on going, but now with giant battlemechs thrown into the mix. The subterranean *Core Combat* expansion may have disappeared down its own hole, but recent updates have managed to keep the fighting fresh.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 131



EVE ONLINE

Best described as 'Elite Online', the sedate nature of *EVE* has managed to pull in more and more space traders with each passing month. It may not be the most human of MMOGs, but it's definitely worth putting the time into it considering what you get back.

PUB CCP DEV CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130



ANARCHY ONLINE

Quirky science-fiction action abounds in this ever-popular take on mankind's distant future. Two major expansions (one practically bigger than the original game) and a forthcoming graphical overhaul is doing more than enough to keep the world of Rubi-ka buzzing.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 148



FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE

Probably the best of the non-*EverQuest* fantasy MMOGs (although not by much), this Japanese entry into the genre is about as fully realised a world as you can get. The controls may be cumbersome, but you can't deny the atmosphere that lies within.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Square Enix

PCZ ISSUE 148



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

The fantasy version of *Planetside* (although without the FPS-trappings) is still going strong, despite firm opposition. It's starting to show its age now, although a graphical overhaul due in a few months time might be enough to keep it competitive.

PUB Mythic Entertainment DEV Mythic Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 149



STAR WARS GALAXIES

Jump To Lightspeed has recently added the final piece of the *Star Wars* jigsaw – space combat – but is it too little, too late? There's a loyal audience of Jedi wannabes in there, but the Force is growing weaker. Nonetheless, there's still plenty to admire here, including a superb skill system.

PUB Activision DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 151



EVERQUEST

The original can't compare to its sequel in terms of looks and polished gameplay, but five years of expansions have kept its half a million regular players more than happy. There's more on the way too, just in case you feel like keeping it old school.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 149

ONLINE SHOOTERS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making *UT2004* the definitive choice.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138

BATTLEFIELD 1942



Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience, minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life.

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING



150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although *PlanetSide* begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.

PUB NovaLogic DEV NovaLogic

PCZ ISSUE 145

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM



Take *BF1942*, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than *BF1942*, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.

PUB EA DEV DICE Canada

PCZ ISSUE 141

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE



The daddy of all online shooters is back, running on the jaw-dropping *Half-Life 2* engine. All your favourites are here – Dust, Italy, Office – all with realistic physics. All that's missing is *HL2*'s ability to pick up objects, but it's surely only a mod away.

PUB VU Games DEV Valve

NOT REVIEWED

SPACE COMBAT

X2: THE THREAT



Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 138

FREELANCER



Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft DEV Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128

X - GOLD



The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this huge trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 82

TERMINUS



Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion – we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk DEV Vicarious Visions

PCZ ISSUE 93

Freespace 2



Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but does suffer from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay DEV Volition Inc

PCZ ISSUE 84

SPORT

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005



Eidos and the *Champ Man* licence have got a hell of a lot to beat in Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* – easily the most streamlined and absorbing management game to come out of its stable to date. It's management in its purest form, with an improved match engine working under the bonnet of a sparkling (well, green and gray) redesigned interface. We're just as addicted as we always were.

PUB Sega DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 149

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4



Fact. This is the finest arcade football game ever. Incomparably better than any *FIFA* offering, *PES* is the only footie game that plays like the real thing – with all the joys and agonies that entails.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 149

VIRTUA TENNIS



Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hittmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005



Some new game modes gives 2005's Tiger 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

NHL 2005



Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

3D ACTION/STRATEGY

BROTHERS IN ARMS



Clever and intuitive tactics (once you get into the meat of it) meld with the WWII first-person scenario you know and love. More realistic than the bombastic Hollywood fare in *Call Of Duty*, *Brothers In Arms* is an admirably gritty and highly replayable jaunt, flanking Nazis through the woods, fields and foxholes of wartime Normandy. Essentially the place where *Medal Of Honor* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* collide, it comes highly recommended.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Gearbox

PCZ ISSUE 153

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

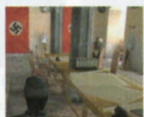


The Game of the Year edition of *Flashpoint* remains widely available, and remains as wonderfully immersive as ever. With the *Resistance* expansion alongside the original missions, if you love tactical warfare, you'll love this.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2



With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH



Smack! and, indeed, kerblammo! as our favourite heroes travel through time to fight the Nazis. Much comic silliness, knock-about combat and ironic guffawing make the second *FF* game a blast. If you like that kind of thing.

PUB Digital Jesters DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 154

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR



A remarkably innovative military simulator, *FSW* provides tense urban combat with you in a commanding role – despite feeling as if you're in the line of fire with your two fire-teams. It gets repetitive, but it's worth a look.

PUB THQ DEV Pandemic Studios

PCZ ISSUE 147

DISC PAGES


EXCLUSIVE!

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

USE YOUR HEAD



DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ Today's world is obsessed with physical perfection. Every day we're subjected to images of impossibly beautiful people, assailed by adverts for low-fat food and made to feel guilty about sitting on our arse playing games. But what about the mental side of things? Going to the gym won't stimulate your mind, and jumping up and down in front of a TV trying to copy some obscure celebrity's most recent version of how to get fit is liable to make you more stupid if anything. So just how do we go about keeping the old grey matter in shape?

For starters, ditch the TV, boot your computer up and whack in this month's discs because we've got a whole load of demos to stimulate the dustiest of Mekon-sized brains. *Brothers In Arms* provides a more cerebral challenge than your average shooter, with its blend of first-person action and overhead strategic view. *Cossacks II* offers the chance to think in terms of tactics as you command vast legions of soldiers in Napoleonic-era warfare. Or, if that all sounds like far too much hard work, what about giving someone else's brain a workout with the psychically challenged *Psychonauts* and *Second Sight* demos? Mind you, if just the thought of mental exercise has caused your brain to seize up, try the multiplayer *Pariah* demo or *Project: Snowblind* (run, shoot, repeat – how taxing can it be?). So next time someone moans at you for playing games all the time, you can explain that you're actually going for a full mind workout...

BROTHERS IN ARMS

CD1/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: Gearbox Software Rev: Issue 153, 87%

GEARBOX'S tactical WWII shooter seems to have divided opinion among the PC ranks, so this exclusive demo gives you a chance to see for yourself what all the palava is about. The first mission's really only there to get you up to speed with the controls before tasking you with clearing the Vierville village of those pesky Nazis. Under your command are your trusty fire team and an M5 Stuart tank, but don't get too gung-ho as you're not the only piece of battle machinery in the area.



1 Comrades – this guy's on your side, so try not to shoot him. Make sure you use your context-sensitive indicator to tell him to lay down suppressing fire.

2 Enemy soldiers – there are no suicidal soldiers running out to meet you here. These two have found a handy hiding place behind the wall.

3 Suppression indicators – all red means they'll be firing at full pelt but when it turns completely grey, they'll spend more time hiding than anything.

4 Fire team indicator – this means that your fire team is fully focused on this enemy, so they'll be receiving the full brunt of their firepower.

5 Your tank – use this wisely and try to front off against enemies straight on, as the side and rear armour on this thing are its weak spots.

6 Cover – make good use of any walls, boxes, or anything else you can hide behind. Great for a quick breather or re-arming before heading into the fray.

ON THE FLANKS

Brothers In Arms relies heavily upon one staple warfare tactic: flanking. You'll have to make the most of teamwork to use your two teams effectively together. Here are the basic steps...



FIND HIM

If possible, make good use of buildings and cover to sneak up on enemy positions. If you can pinpoint him before he sees you, you're in with a great chance of a clean kill.



FIX HIM

Once you have his position noted, order one team to lay down suppressing fire. Once the circle above an enemy's head has turned completely grey, they will be fully suppressed. Now's your chance to...



FLANK HIM

Take the other team or go solo and use the tactical map to find a position where you can attack the enemy's flank, thereby depriving him of any vital cover he might be utilising to shelter from the other team.



FINISH HIM

Quite simple this: round the last corner and pepper the Germans with bullets before they've had a chance to realise their cover's blown. Now you can just sit back and smile smugly at your tactical superiority.



IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD, but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a

library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV); bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain

games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse. Unless you're a real pikey.



PSYCHONAUTS

CD2/DVD Pub: Majesco Dev: Double Fine Rev: Issue 156, 90%



Walking the thin psychic line.

YOU'VE GOT to try this demo of Tim 'Grim Fandango' Schafer's latest, which brings a whole new meaning to psychological warfare. Featuring trademark Schafer humour, the demo gives you the chance to check out the often amusing beginning of the title. Make sure you explore the campgrounds thoroughly, before heading to the top of the tree for your Basic Braining where you'll have to pick your way through the mental assault course of Coach Oleander's mind.



This guy bullies you! It can't be right.



Mastering this requires deft footwork.

CHALLENGE SUZY!
DON'T MISS A THING
Can you collect all of the Psi cards and figments as well as free all of the emotional baggage? (Use your menu to keep track of how you're doing.)

THINK CLEARLY

The brain is literally a mind-boggling place and Coach Oleander's is no exception. Filled with cunning platform levels, it also offers an opportunity for a bit of spring-cleaning, *Psychonauts*-style



FIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION

These neon carnival-style pictures are littered about the landscape of Oleander's mind but they're harmless enough. Collect enough of them to make Raz go up a rank.



EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

We all have emotional baggage so while you're here, keep an eye out for any crying bags. Once you've found a matching tag, you can return it to the teary owner to set it free!



VAULT

This is where all of the memories and dirty little secrets are locked away in someone's mind. But nothing is confidential in *Psychonauts*, so bust them open and take a look!



PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

CD2/DVD Pub: Eidos Dev: Crystal Dynamics Rev: Issue 155, 78%

AS FAR AS relationships go, *Project: Snowblind* is probably best thought of as a twice-removed cousin of *Deus Ex*. This Opera House level provides plenty of frantic action, as you make mincemeat of your enemies on your way to extract the hapless scientist that needs rescuing. As well as the *Deus Ex*-inspired bio-mods, you can choose your poison from the extensive and varied arsenal on offer.

SECOND SIGHT

DVD ONLY Pub: Codemasters Dev: Free Radical Design Rev: Issue 152, 68%

EXPAND your mind with this demo of Codemasters' psychic third-person adventure. The action starts as you awaken in a hospital room with one hell of a headache, not much memory (sounds like a hangover) and a knack for mind games. The demo's only playable for 15 minutes but if you like what you see, it offers you the chance to unlock the full game for cash.



CUSTOMPLAY GOLF

DVD ONLY
Pub: Fusion Labs Dev: CustomPlay Games Rev: Issue 156, 75%

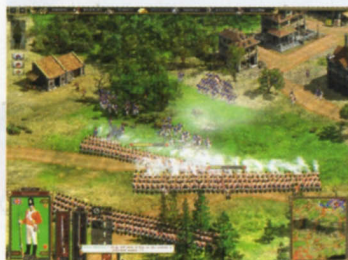
IT'S TIME to dig out your golfing trousers and dust off that Pringles sweater for this CustomPlay Golf demo. There are three holes for you to practise your swing on and should you feel the need, you can also create your own hole. Make sure you keep an eye out for the custom PC ZONE tees, balls, flags and splash screen!



COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS

DVD ONLY Pub: CDV Dev: GSC Game World Rev: Issue 154, 80%

IF THE flanking technique in *Brothers In Arms* just doesn't offer the tactical variety you crave, this massive demo of CDV's strategy title should provide the military manoeuvres you're after. Use the tutorials to become acquainted with the controls, before going on to lead your men to European supremacy in the battles of Aspern-Essling and Ulm.



TACTICAL STRIKE

The sheer size of your armies can make the battles seem a little daunting but with a few well-used tactics, you can make sure the battle goes in your favour...



Hold your fire for as long as possible so that when you finally do let rip it causes maximum carnage. As well as decimating the opponent's line, it will heavily decrease their morale, often making them flee in terror.



Cannons can swing the tide of battle so make sure you look after them. If enemy forces do overrun your cannon crew, make sure you re-man it ASAP. Case shot is great for close combat whilst normal cannonballs are long-range but inaccurate.



Use the landscape to your advantage. Forests minimise damage to your men by providing them with extra cover, whilst swampy areas can sometimes make a cannonball's fuse fizzle out completely.

PARIAH

MULTIPLAYER

DVD ONLY Pub: Hip Interactive Dev: Digital Extremes Rev: Issue 155, 81%

THE SINGLE-PLAYER experience in *Pariah* is patchy yet enjoyable, but it's backed up by some multiplayer pretty reminiscent of the *UT* series (if not as good). As such, it's worth checking out – especially seeing as the weapon upgrade system is rather nifty. It won't take over the world, but it is big, bouncy, colourful and nicely violent. The grenade launcher's a doozy as well.



● **ALSO ON THE CD** Contents of this month's Indie Zone and *Diver Down* from Freeplay
● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Championship Manager 5*, *Act Of War* (multiplayer), *House Of The Dead III*, *Domination Movies*



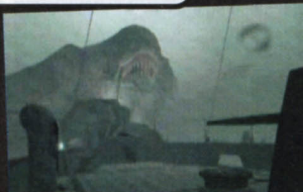
MOVIES

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

CALL OF CTHULHU

DVD ONLY Renowned *Elder Scrolls* developer Bethesda is hard at work putting together the game of HP Lovecraft's seminal horror novel...

ALSO SHOWING...



THE GREAT OLD ONES They're back! Check the size of this guy!



INSANITY SYSTEM Contend with your growing madness in-game



BAD GUYS A variety of strange and disturbing enemies oppose you



DISTURBING The sinister tone is just like the book



BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL (DVD ONLY)

Get a glimpse of the locations, weaponry, transport and gringos that you'll meet throughout the course of Atari's multi-faceted shooter set in South America. Will it really prove to be as good as this video suggests? **DON'T MISS** - The truck on two wheels. Will Russ Swift make a guest appearance?



AUTO ASSAULT (DVD ONLY)

This driving title is one of the few really original concepts for MMOs out there, but will it really be able to provide the *Mad Max* experience we all dreamed of as kids? The video shows off some impressive acrobatic driving, tasty settings and plenty of explosive action. **DON'T MISS** - The vehicle getting airborne off the hilltop to destroy the helicopter!



GUILD WARS (DVD ONLY)

With an intro movie to rival *World Of Warcraft's*, it remains to be seen if the subscription-free MMORPG can do as well. Once you've finished gazing at the intro, take a look at the gameplay movie to get a peek at the fighting and some of the locations on offer. **DON'T MISS** - Dodging the incoming skull-tipped flail in the intro movie.



MOTGP3: URT (DVD ONLY)

If you prefer two wheels to four, then you'll love the next instalment of *MotoGP*. Featuring updated teams from the 2004 season, plenty of street racing and the all-new Extreme mode, this title looks set to give PC bikers a chance to really get their knee down. **DON'T MISS** - The perfect wheelie being pulled. Show off.

ALSO ON THE DVD *Close Combat: First To Fight* and *Total Overdose*

EXTENDED PLAY



Feel the force of the Combine Smackdown.



WE'VE FEATURED Garry's Mod a lot on these pages, as it provides a chance to play around with the Source engine that's easy enough for anyone to get to grips with. Out of it has spawned hundreds of hilarious screenshots, a whole new world of opportunity for sexual poses, and some amazing videos of Rube Goldberg-style physics set-ups. But BrashFink has taken the concept a whole new step further with his brilliant *Apostasy* comic, created with the mod. Featuring amazingly professional designs of Marvel-quality calibre, BrashFink has brought out episode one of his story set around the world of Gordon Freeman's adventures. Make sure you keep an eye out for future episodes on the disc.

DON'T MISS - The Combine guards' radio noise brilliantly recreated in onomatopoeia.

MISSION EDITORS - SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY AND SWAT

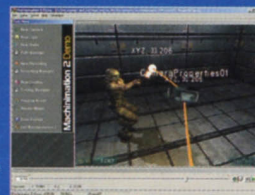


THE mod-makers among you should be happy with this double-bill of mission editors: one for *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and the other for *SWAT 4*. We can't wait to start seeing some good missions made for either of these fantastic titles, so we're imploring mod makers to boot up your editors. Get creating and remember to send us your efforts!



MACHINIMATION 2

Fountainhead Entertainment's well known in the Machinima community for its award-winning 'Anna' video, and it's come up trumps again with this brilliant *Doom 3* mod - it allows you to direct your own Machinima using id's impressive rendering technology. If you manage to create something special, why not send it to the usual address for us to have a look at?



MODS OF THE MONTH

THIS issue's Mods of the Month include the teamwork-heavy *Plan Of Attack* (the first proper *Half-Life 2* mod around), *Killing Floor* which turns *UT2004* into a zombie carnage fest, and the *SWAT* mod for *Call Of Duty* that enables you to play as the US Police Dept in a variety of custom maps. *Enemy Territory Fortress* ports the *Quake III* mod to *Enemy Territory*, and *Wizards' Islands: Scourge Of The Frost Bringer* is a massive mod for *Morrowind* that gives up to 30 hours' extra play.



BUG-FIX OF THE MONTH

Bizarre Problems Fixed In A Patch

THIS MONTH: COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS: ZERO HOUR

Patch v1.04 fixes "the bug where Colonel Burton could destroy aircraft by knife-attack".

ALSO ON THE CD *DM_Gulch* and *DM_Mine Half-Life 2* maps, Experian Software

ALSO ON THE DVD Click For More digital magazine

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry - phone our helpline on 01225 442244 and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk. **SUPPORT YOU DIAL...**

If you're calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information - ie system type,

soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

■ Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

■ To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.

■ Future Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

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GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

Freedom isn't free – it takes blood, sweat, the odd tear and in this case, a group of talented game designers. Sam Kiildsen wanders the wastelands in search of the story behind a freeform classic...

PROFILE

With a history stretching back to 1988 and the release of *Wayne Gretzky Hockey*, Maryland-based Bethesda Softworks (or Bethesda as it's known to its chums) has become an undisputed gaming establishment, making its name with the *Elder Scrolls* series of games and their spin-offs. A fourth instalment of the series is being polished as you read this, and the firm also made the spotlight recently when it announced it had purchased the rights to develop *Fallout 3*...



NAME: Todd Howard
ROLE ON MORROWIND: Project leader
FIRST GAME WORKED ON: NCAA: Road to the Final Four 2
WHERE IS HE NOW: Working on *Oblivion* and *Fallout 3* at Bethesda.



NAME: Ken Rolston
ROLE ON MORROWIND: Lead designer
FIRST GAME WORKED ON: *An Elder Scrolls Legend: Battlespire*
WHERE IS HE NOW: Still at Bethesda, working on *Oblivion*.



GAME The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

DEVELOPER Bethesda Softworks

PUBLISHER Ubisoft

RELEASED May 2002

INFLUENCED *Morrowind's* scope and ambition was so vast that finding games it heavily influenced is difficult. However, features like the ability to choose whether to participate in the central adventure or to simply become happily sidetracked on mini-quests and exploration have cropped up in many RPGs since.

ALONG WITH hex-based strat 'em ups and those soulless management sims our German cousins seem to adore so much, RPGs used to be one of the ugliest gaming genres around. While the likes of *Baldur's Gate* and *Diablo* looked presentable enough in their day, such games were kept grovelling in the shade by the gloriously-lovely likes of *Unreal*, *Half-Life* et al. This was the unwritten rule until spring 2002, when PC roleplayers got their first real taste of succulent eye candy with the release of *Morrowind*, the long-awaited third instalment of Bethesda Softworks' *Elder Scrolls* series.

Pixel shading, now almost as much a PC gaming staple as WASD keyboard controls, was but a twinkle in some crazy coder's eye until *Morrowind* arrived on the scene, wowing all and sundry with its eye-popping water effects. But the game was to prove far more than a mere visual feast for graphics-starved RPGers. It happened to be one of the most ambitious, wide-ranging titles ever to appear on a home computer, giving you the freedom, as Bethesda's motto has it, "to live another life in another world".

IN LIMBO

Creating this feeling of liberty was a core part of the previous *Elder Scrolls* games, *Arena* and *Daggerfall*, and it was always going to figure in the series' third title. In fact, as project leader Todd Howard points out, *Morrowind* was originally planned to be extremely similar to its predecessor. "We first came up with the idea around 1996, during *Daggerfall's* final days. The initial concept was to build on the *Daggerfall* codebase and do it like that, but in high resolution."

This was not to be: the project was put on hold while Bethesda worked on the *Elder Scrolls* spin-off *Redguard*, and it was to be three long years until the team returned to the drawing board. "We then realised we needed to start from the ground up," continues Howard, "building a new game for a new generation of RPG players."

Ken Rolston, *Morrowind's* lead designer and the man tasked with shaping its story and setting, had come to the company during the game's three-year hiatus. "I inherited the basic idea from (Bethsoft senior developers) Kurt Kuhlmann and Michael Kirkbride," he says. "*Tribunal* was the original title, and its basic concept – a culture shaped by its peculiar relationship with its three-gods-who-had-been-mortals – was always at the core of the tone and theme of *Morrowind*. The game has a strange and alien setting; its people and culture are dark and distinctive. All the other narratives and conflicts grew out of this exotic setting."

ALL THE SMALL THINGS

While Howard knew the game had to be huge in scale, he also wanted to fill it with tiny, intricate details at the very lowest of levels. In this respect, the team took their inspiration from the *Ultima* series. "*Ultima VII* in particular was a key influence for me, in how open the world could be," Howard recalls. "We wanted to model and manipulate every object in the world: every bowl, every spoon, that kind of stuff."

Realising the magnitude of such a task, the team developed the *Morrowind* Construction Set, a surprisingly simple editing tool that enabled them to assemble the game world – from the top right down to the smallest of minutiae – at a faster pace. "The game just seemed to grow and grow," grins Howard. "We kept honing our toolset so we could manipulate the enormous amount of data we were creating."

With the tools in place, the team could begin crafting the game's world: the gigantic island of Vvardenfell. Naturally, this produced problems of its own. Where do you start, for instance, when you've got to create a continent from scratch? "At the design level, the first step was to create regions with distinctive features and themes, like the rock-and-marsh of the south-west coast, and the wide grasslands of the east," says Rolston.

"Morrowind has a strange and alien setting; its people and culture are dark and distinctive"

KEN ROLSTON LEAD DESIGNER, MORROWIND

"The remarkable part of that creation is at the artist-landscape designer's detail level – the shaping of landscape, the selection of rock texture, the placement of plants, rocks, fungi and flowers. *Morrowind* also has an exceptional sense of routes and pathfinding; the land forces you away from the straight path, and in doing so it slyly reveals ruins just out of reach on the slopes of a mountain, or a citadel glimpsed from a high prospect. The landscape constantly presents you with new, distant or hard to reach features that suck you into the exploring experience."

A CAST OF THOUSANDS

In addition to a stimulating physical environment, *Morrowind* required inhabitants, a culture and some form of social framework. Ken Rolston's extensive background in the pen-and-paper RPG industry made him the ideal man to flesh out the world.

"Sandy Petersen (veteran tabletop RPG author) has always said that the worst pen-and-paper RPG session he'd ever seen was still way better than the best computer RPG play experience, and I agree totally. Nonetheless, the PnP RPGs have provided the

universities where us designers have learned the trade of setting and theme development. *Morrowind*'s settings and themes are wide and deep because I learned to appreciate and create those features in my PnP game designs."

The Vvardenfell that Rolston helped to build is populated by 2,500-odd NPCs, plus a raft of ferocious wildlife and demonic deadra. It's also home to several villages, towns and one large city, along with numerous subterranean caves, mines and tombs, each home to someone – or something. It's a location that Rolston remains proud of to this day. "I love its sense of place, its

THE FUTURE



LIVING IN OBLIVION

While we may not see other developers working on *Morrowind*-esque titles, Bethesda is currently working on its follow-up, *Oblivion*. Currently scheduled to appear before the end of the year, *Oblivion* is set in another part of the *Elder Scrolls* world – the Imperial capital, no less – and its plot revolves around the assassination of the Emperor and the opening of a portal to Oblivion, a hellish underworld populated by legions of demonic nasties.

If the screenshots are any indication, we're in for another visual feast, while Bethesda is promising to inject far more life into the realm's inhabitants. Improved AI gives the NPCs daily cycles, needs and desires, while combat will be far more visceral and dynamic than that of *Morrowind*. Gameplay-wise, you can expect another freeform approach, giving you the opportunity to again join various different factions or simply do your own thing and ignore the main quest. We can't wait.

other-worldliness. That sense is present in the landscape, the architecture, the clothing, the religions, the Great Houses and the individual themes and stories of the characters."

WEIRD GAFF

Indeed, one of the things that strikes you

about *Morrowind* is the oddness and peculiarity of its setting; it has all the ingredients of a familiar, generic fantasy world – elves, dwarves, monsters, swords and sorcery – and yet doesn't feel familiar or generic. This was Rolston's intention: "From

Glorantha (PnP RPG), I took inspiration from a resolutely nothing-like-Tolkien set of cultural and religious conflicts in the fantasy setting. And then from LARP (live action roleplay) game design, I took the fundamental underpinnings of social, religious and political faction conflicts that give depth to the stories and characters in *Morrowind*."

"We're always trying to create that PnP experience with the *Elder Scrolls*," adds Todd Howard. "So Ken was instrumental in how we set up and executed this freeform game where you could really roleplay, while also being

DID YOU KNOW?

Wonders never cease. Thought the voices of *Morrowind*'s female Nords sounded familiar? Well, that's because they were provided by none other than Wonder Woman herself, 1970s sex symbol Lynda Carter. You live and learn, eh?



The towns feature a wide variety of architectural styles.

challenged and entertained. He's brilliant and insane at the same time."

NOD NOD, WINK WINK

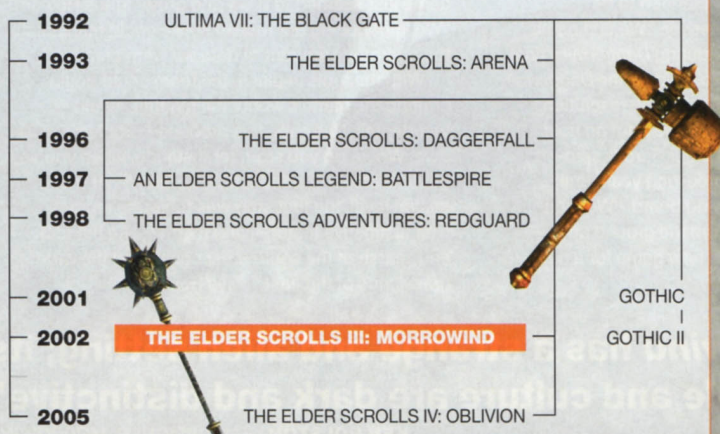
Bearing in mind that final comment, one suspects that Rolston may have been behind some of *Morrowind*'s quirkier aspects. The man himself remains tight-lipped when it comes to this subject. "There's a wealthy, alcoholic talking mudcrab in the islands on the south-east coast. What's more, many people have savoured the whimsical allusion to Icarus that plunges from the skies and crashes to the ground in front of you. I absolutely forbid our designers to allow any humorous nonsense like that into the final version of the game," he says with a wry smile.

"I have no idea how it got past my ever-vigilant editorial delete key."

While Ken Rolston was instrumental in providing the themes and backgrounds, the visual side of things was Todd Howard's domain. "I hold Todd completely responsible for our pioneering forays into cutting-edge visuals," attests Rolston. "I would have been content to make evolutionary advances in the genre, focusing on content, setting and theme, character, plot and exploration. Todd wanted revolutionary advances in graphics and revolutionary advances in console design and interface. We designers were the lucky ones, working mostly with familiar

FAMILY TREE

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind is the ultimate freeform roleplayer, offering liberty and scale of a level only before seen in 2D games. On top of that though, it was also one of the first RPGs to feature truly gobsmacking 3D visuals...





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narrative technologies. Todd and the artists and programmers were marching courageously into the unknown.

Combine our ambitions to achieve new levels of graphical splendour with our ambitions to make the 'Biggest Game Of All Time', and we were confronting terrible risks. The team successfully managed those risks, bringing *Morrowind* in at the exact sweet spot of achievable graphic distinction."

"Getting it right was very important to me," Howard adds.

"I'm the graphics whore and Ken is the text whore, and I think that *Morrowind* really represented a coming together of those two disciplines. In this day and age most of the audience is enticed by

sexy graphics, but they stay for the deep gameplay."

THE SMELL OF SUCCESS

Enticed the gamers were, and stay they did. *Morrowind* was a huge commercial success upon its release, both on PC and, somewhat surprisingly for Howard, on Xbox. "I thought it would be successful, but I think I underestimated how many people wanted a game like that and how long it would be successful. I really underestimated how popular it would be on Xbox."

Ken Rolston was less shocked by the enthusiastic response. "I have very serious ego needs," he chuckles. "I've also had many satisfying, successful designs in the past. So it would have killed me if it hadn't been a success."

Morrowind also garnered a warm reaction from the gaming press, who

"I have very serious ego needs, so it would have killed me if *Morrowind* hadn't been a successful game"

KEN ROLSTON LEAD DESIGNER, *MORROWIND*



A siltstrider – the closest thing to a bus on Vvardenfell.

heaped praise on its visuals, scope and freeform gameplay style; we gave it a stellar 94 per cent in issue 116. But not everyone loved it. A quick scout online reveals a slew of recurring criticisms: a lack of direction; too slow-paced; characters that were impassive and dull.

The perceived lack of direction can be put down to *Morrowind*'s open-endedness (a big plus in most reviewers' and fans' eyes). The pacing depends on personal preference, but Howard agrees there's some truth in the third point.

"If I could go back, I'd spend more time on the dialogue and general characters in the game to add more life – they do feel very stale," he admits. "I know it's a desolate world, but at times it came across as too lifeless." It seems that Bethesda is spending a lot of time ensuring that such a criticism won't be levelled at *Morrowind*'s follow-up, the forthcoming *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (see 'The Future', opposite page).

Following its release, *Morrowind*'s lifespan was bolstered by two

successful expansions, *Tribunal* and *Bloodmoon*, not to mention Bethesda's decision to ship the Construction Set – the selfsame toolset that had been so invaluable during development – with the finished product. This gave fans the means to build and modify content for the game.

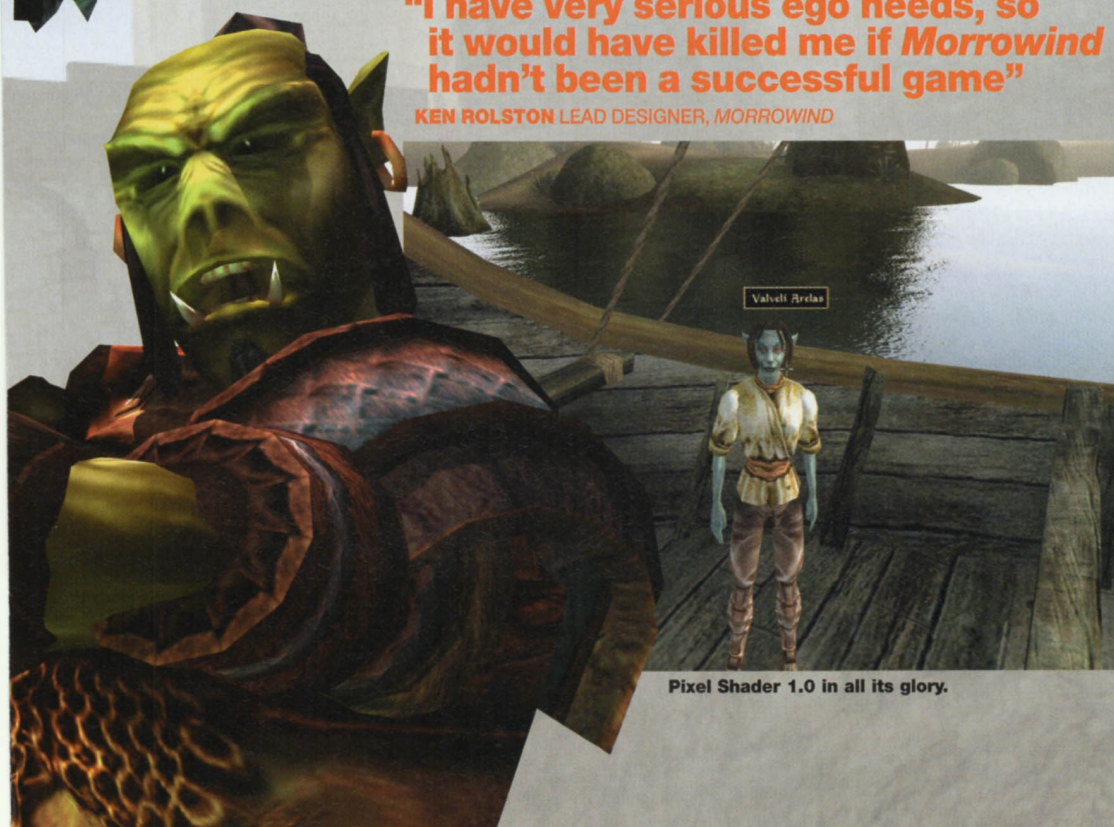
"The number of plug-ins created and downloaded is staggering," says Howard. "I think the big fan site is over five million downloads and growing rapidly. That's a big number. One of my favourites was created by Brian Robb; you can run around, do *Matrix*-style combat and lop people's heads off. We eventually hired him full-time."

INDIVIDUAL AND PROUD

Despite *Morrowind*'s resounding success, there have been very few imitators or even strongly influenced titles released since. Ken Rolston believes he knows why. "It's just too difficult. MMORPGs can provide vast landscapes and epic scope, but they lack the narrative depth to make those settings more than entertaining loot-and-advancement treadmills. Single-player games can spend more energy on character and story, but they generally don't have the time or resources to build such wide and deep settings."

In fact, it's likely that in this 3D-centric age of games development, no company will ever again attempt to create a game offering such breadth and freedom as *Morrowind*. Even Bethesda seems to be narrowing the scope or altering the focus with *Oblivion*, which will feature less NPCs and fewer quests, with much of the emphasis on recreating convincing emotions and reactions in the game's inhabitants rather than on building the largest world possible.

So *Morrowind* may well turn out to be one of a kind, which suits its creators. "I loved it," says Rolston. "For all its flaws and blemishes, it's a classic monster whose like shall never be seen again. It was too big, too grand in conception, too overwhelming in scope to ever be produced. It was a miracle." And sometimes, thankfully for the game's legions of fans, miracles do happen. [E]



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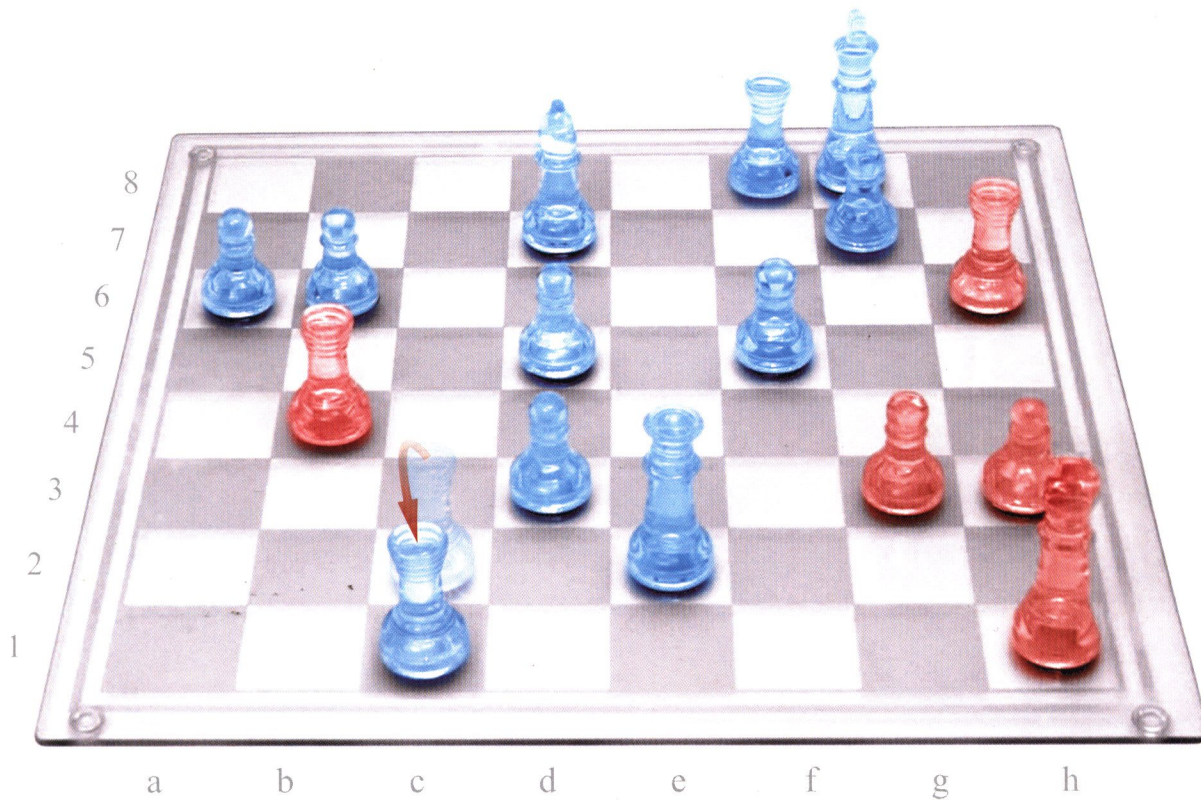
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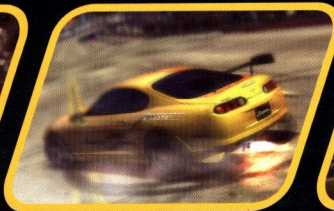


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